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THE WORKS OF

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

IN TWENTY-FOUR VOLUMES

LIMITED EDITION

LIMITED, FOR SALE IN AMERICA, TO ONE THOUSAND NUMBERED AND REGISTERED SETS, OF WHICH THIS IS NUMBER 1346

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He, or she, rather, remained one moment motionless on the threshold.—Page 130.

THE WORKS OF

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

VOLUME TWO

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY
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MADEMOISELLE DE MAUPIN

PART TWO

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Mademoiselle De Maupin

MADEMOISELLE DE MAUPIN

VIII

NO, my dear Silvio, no; I have not forgotten you. I am not of those who go through life without ever looking back. My past follows me and treads upon the heels of the present, and even of the future; your friendship is one of the sunlit spots that stand out most distinctly on the already blue horizon of my latter years: often, from the height I have reached, I turn round to contemplate it with a smile of ineffable melancholy.

What fair days those were! How angelically pure were we! Our feet scarce touched the ground; we felt as though we wore wings, our desires carried us up and away, and the springtime breeze caused the golden halo of youth to wave about our brows.

Do you remember the islet of poplars at the fork of the stream? To reach it we had to cross by a pretty long and very narrow plank that gave in the centre;

a regular goat's bridge, scarce used, in fact, but by the goats, — it was charming. Short, thick grass, in which bloomed the pretty little winking blue eyes of the forget-me-not; a path yellow as nankeen, that was the belt of the isle's green robe and encircled its waist; an ever tremulous shade of quivering aspen and poplar, — these were not the least delights of this paradise. Great webs of linen, which women stretched out there to bleach in the dew, looked like squares of snow. And do you remember that brown, sunburned little lass, whose great wild eyes shone so brightly under the locks of her long hair, and who ran after the goats threatening them with her waving willow wand when they made as though they would step on the linen she was appointed to guard? And the sulphur-yellow butterflies, with their fluttering, erratic flight; and the kingfisher that had its nest in the thick alders, and that we so often tried to catch? And the steep ways that led down to the river, with the roughly cut steps, the posts and the stakes green at the bottom, that were almost always closed by a lattice of plants and branches? What limpid water it was, and what a sheen upon it, with its bed of golden gravel showing through, and what a pleasure it was to sit on the bank and let our feet dip into

it! The water-lilies with their yellow blooms looked, as they spread out, like the green locks on the polished shoulders of a naiad bathing. The sky reflected itself in this mirror with azure smiles and the most ravishing pearly-grey light; at every hour of the day it scattered turquoises and spangles, soft wool and shimmering silks in endless variety. And how I loved those squadrons of little ducks, with emerald necks, that sailed unceasingly from shore to shore, rippling the smooth surface of the stream!

We were indeed well fitted to be the figures in this landscape; we did indeed become that gentle and restful scene and readily did we harmonise with it. Springtime without, youth within, sunshine on the turf, a smile on our lips, a snowy shower of blossoms on every bush, in our souls a bloom of candid illusions, the same chaste blush on the wild rose and on our cheeks, poesy singing in our hearts, unseen birds warbling in the trees — light, and cooing of doves, scents and numberless mingled murmurs, beating hearts, and ripple of water over pebbles, grass growing and thoughts springing, a drop of water gliding on calyx-tip, tear-drop trembling on eyelash, a love sigh and a rustling of leaves . . . — oh! what evenings we have spent walk-

ing slowly there, so close to the edge that often we had one foot in the water and one on the ground.

Alas! it did not last long, for me at least; you, on the other hand, managed to retain the innocence of the child even while acquiring the knowledge of man. The germ of corruption that was in me grew fast, and gangrene pitilessly devoured all that I had of pure and holy. My friendship for you is the one good thing that has remained to me.

I am in the habit of concealing nothing of my thoughts or deeds from you. I have laid bare to you the most secret fibres of my heart; no matter how absurd, ridiculous, eccentric may be the motions of my soul, to you I must tell them; but in very truth what I have been feeling for some time is so utterly strange that I scarce dare own it even to myself. I told you once that I was afraid that by dint of seeking to find Beauty and striving to reach it I should fall at length into the impossible or the monstrous. I have almost got to that point. When shall I get away from all those cross currents that carry me now this way and now that? When will my vessel's deck cease to tremble under me as it is swept by the waves of all these storms? Where can I find a haven in which I may cast anchor; a

firmly fixed rock, out of reach of the seas, on which I may dry myself and press the foam from out my hair ?

You know with what ardour I have sought physical beauty, what importance I attach to external form, and what deep love I feel for the visible world. It must be that I am too corrupt, too disillusioned to believe in moral beauty and to seek after it perseveringly. I have wholly lost the knowledge of good and evil, and by dint of depravation I have almost got back to the ignorance of a child or a savage. The truth is that nothing strikes me as praiseworthy or blameworthy, and the strangest actions hardly astonish me. My conscience has become deaf and dumb. Adultery seems to me the most innocent thing in the world; I think it quite natural that a young girl should prostitute herself. I feel as though I should betray my friends without the least remorse, and I should have no scruple whatever in pushing over the edge of a precipice people who happened to be in my way, if I were walking along the brink with them. I could look on coldly at the most atrocious scenes, and there is something not displeasing to me in the sufferings and woes of humanity. When some calamity befalls our world I experience

the same sensation of biting, bitter pleasure that comes to us when we at last avenge an insult of long standing.

What hast thou done to me, O world, that I hate thee so? What has made me so bitter against thee? What did I look for from thee that I bear thee such rancorous grudge for having deceived me? What high hopes hast thou failed to fulfil? What eaglet's pinions hast thou pruned? What gates were they thou wert to open and kept closed, and which of us has proved untrue to the other?

Naught touches, naught moves me. I no longer feel, as I listen to the tale of heroic deeds, the splendid thrill that formerly fired my whole being. Indeed the whole business strikes me as rather childish. No accents strike deep enough to stir my relaxed heart-strings and to make them vibrate; I watch my fellow-men weep just as I watch the rain fall, unless their tears are of purer water, reflect the light picturesquely, and course down a lovely cheek. It is for animals only that I still feel some slight pity. I should not interfere if a peasant or a servant were mauled with blows, but I would not allow a horse or a dog to be so treated in my presence. Yet I am not cruel, I have

never harmed any one and am not likely to do so; this, however, is rather the result of my idlesse and of the supreme contempt I feel for all people whom I dislike, a contempt which will not allow me to have aught to do with them, even for the purpose of hurting them. I abhor everybody in the lump, and in the mass I scarce distinguish one or two worthy of being particularly hated. To hate any one is to think about him as much as if you loved him; it means that you pick out that person and separate him from the multitude; that you are in a state of excitement about him; that you have him in mind when waking and dream of him when sleeping; that you tear at your pillow and gnash your teeth as you remember that he lives. What more do men do for those they love? Would one take the pains and trouble in order to please one's love that one takes to harm an enemy? I doubt it. In order to hate any one properly, you must love some one else. Every deep hatred is the counterpoise of some deep love; whom, then, can I hate, — I who love nothing?

Hatred in me is like love, — a vague, undetermined feeling which seeks to settle on something and fails to do so. I bear within me a crushing treasure of

love and hatred that I know not what to do with. If I do not find some way of expending one or the other or both, I shall burst, like a bag so crammed with money that its seams give way and rip open. Oh! if only I could hate some one — if only some one of these dullards with whom I live would insult me so as to make my cold serpent-blood boil within my icy veins, and draw me from the dead somnolence in which I stagnate; if only thou wert to bite my cheek with thy rat-teeth, wretched old witch with the shaking head, and inoculate me with thy venom and rabies; if only some one's death could become life for me; if the last heart-beat of a foe writhing under my heel could lift my hair with thrills of delight and the smell of his blood be sweeter to my thirsty nostrils than the scent of flowers, — how willingly would I give up love and count myself happy!

Then should deadly embraces, a tiger rending his prey, boas choking the life out of their victims with their mighty coils, elephants crushing and flattening out a chest with crackling noise, the scorpion's sting, the milky juice of the euphorbia, the many-curved Malay creese, the blades that shine in the night and whose gleam disappears in blood — take for me the

place of plucked rose-petals, of moist kisses and of love-clasps!

I love nothing, did I say? Alas! I now fear that I do love something. And better a thousand times to hate than to love as I do. I have at last met the type of beauty of which I have dreamed so long. My phantom has taken shape; I have beheld it; it has spoken to me; I have pressed its hand; it is a living creature, and not a chimera. Well did I know I could not be mistaken, and that my presentiments were never false. Yes, Silvio; I stand by the side of the dream of my life; here is my room, and there the one in which it dwells. I can see from here the flutter of the window curtain and the light of the lamp. Its shadow was but now cast upon the blind, and in another hour we shall sup together.

Those glorious Eastern eyelids, that clear, deep glance, that warm tint of pale amber, the long, lustrous black hair, the nose so delicate and high-bred in shape, the wrists and ankles, the feet and the hands, shapely and well turned as in Parmegianino's figures, the exquisite curves, the perfect oval of the face, which make the head so elegant and aristocratic, — all that I sought for, all that I should have been grateful for had I found it

divided up among five or six people, — I have all that united in one person.

Of all things on earth, I most admire beautiful hands. Could you but see these, how perfect they are, how white, how soft, how penetratingly fresh to the touch; how fine the shape of the long fingers, how perfect the contour of the nails, how polished and brilliant, even as the inner petal of a rose! The much bepraised and famous hands of Anne of Austria were, in comparison with these, but the hands of a turkey-herd or of a scullion. Then the grace, the art in the least motions of these hands; the graceful bend of the little finger slightly parted from the others. It drives me crazy to think of those hands; my lips tremble and burn; I close mine eyes so as to see them not, but with their delicate fingers they touch my eyelashes and open my eyelids, and a thousand visions of ivory and snow-whiteness pass before me.

Surely it is Satan's claw which has assumed the outward form of that fair hand; some sarcastic demon is playing with me; there is witchcraft in this, for it is too monstrously impossible.

That hand . . . I am off to Italy to see the works of the great masters, to study, compare, draw, to become

a painter in short, in order to reproduce it as it is, as I see it, as I feel it. Perhaps I may thus rid myself of this sort of obsession.

I longed for beauty without knowing what I was longing for. It is like trying to look at the sun with unclosed eyelids, like trying to handle fire. I am suffering atrociously from my inability to assimilate this perfection, to enter into it, to make it enter into me, to depict it, to make it felt. When I see a beautiful thing I yearn to touch it with my whole being, in every part and at one and the same moment; I would sing it and paint it, carve it and write of it, be loved by it as I love it; I long for what cannot be and never can be.

Your letter hurt me, hurt me deeply. Forgive my saying so. All the calm, innocent happiness you are enjoying, your walks in autumn-tinted woods, your long, tender, intimate talks that end with a chaste kiss on the brow, that life apart and serene, the days that pass so quickly that night seems to come too early, — make the state of internal agitation in which I am living appear still more tempestuous. And so you are to be married in a couple of months; all obstacles have been cleared away, and you are now sure of being each

other's forever. Your happiness of to-day is increased by all your future happiness. You are happy, and are sure of being happier yet very soon. How lucky you are! Your love is fair, but what you love in her is not dead, palpable, material beauty, but eternal and invisible beauty, ever young, the beauty of the soul. She is full of grace and candour, and loves you as such souls as hers know how to love. You did not ask yourself whether her golden hair resembled in tone the hair of the women of Rubens and Giorgione; it delighted you because it was her hair. I dare wager, you lucky lover, that you do not even know whether your love's beauty is of the Greek or the Asiatic, the English or the Italian type. Few indeed, Silvio, are the hearts which are satisfied with pure and simple love, and that ask for no retreat in the forests, no garden on an isle of Lago Maggiore.

Had I the courage to tear myself from this place, I would go and spend a month with you. Perhaps I should become purer, breathing the air you breathe; perhaps your shadowy walks would refresh somewhat my burning brow. But I may not; yours is a Paradise wherein I cannot set foot. Scarcely am I permitted to behold from afar, beyond the wall, the

two fair angels that walk in it, hand in hand, glance meeting glance. Only as a serpent may Satan enter into Eden, and not for all the happiness in heaven, dear Adam, would I play the serpent to your Eve.

What is the fearful work which has been going on in my soul recently, and what is it that has changed my blood into venom? What poison wind deposited in it the germ from which thou hast sprung, O monstrous thought that spreadest thy pale-green boughs and thy hemlock sprays in the icy shadow of my heart? This it is, then, for which I was reserved; in this were all these paths, tried in such desperation, to end! O fate, how thou dost sport with us! All my eagle-like soarings towards the sun, all those heaven-aspiring fires, my divine melancholy, my deep, reserved love, my cult of beauty, that dainty and quaint fancy of mine, that internal spring, inexhaustible and ever-welling, ecstasy with ever outspread wings, reverie blooming more freely than the May, all the poetry of my youth, — all these rare, fair gifts were but to serve to make me the very vilest of men!

I longed for love. I went about madly calling upon and invoking it; I raged as I felt my powerlessness; I excited my hot blood, I dragged my body into the

mire of pleasure; I pressed with almost deadly clasp to my barren breast a young and beautiful woman who loved me — I pursued passion fleeing from me. I have prostituted myself; I have done as might do a maiden taking her way to a brothel in hopes of finding a lover among the men urged thither by debauchery, instead of waiting patiently, in discreet and silent retirement, until the angel God meant for me appeared in a luminous halo with a flower of heaven in its hand. The years I have squandered in puerile excitement, in going hither and thither, in seeking to force nature and time, I ought to have spent in solitude and meditation, in endeavouring to make myself worthy of being loved. That would have been the part of wisdom. But there were scales on my eyes, and I walked straight to the precipice. One foot is already over the brink, and the other, I think, will soon follow. In vain I resist; I feel that I must plunge into this new abyss that has just opened within me.

And that is indeed what I fancied love would prove to be. I now feel what I had only imagined before. This is indeed the dread and delightful insomnia which turns roses into thistles and thistles into roses; this is the sweet sorrow and the wretched happiness, the

ineffable emotion which wraps you round with a golden cloud and makes the outlines of things quiver before your eyes as does intoxication; the sound in the ears in which is always heard the last syllable of the beloved name, the blanchings and the blushings, the sudden thrills, the burning and the icy sweats — it is love indeed, and the poets have spoken the truth.

When I am about to enter the room where we are wont to meet, my heart beats with such violence that it may be seen through my clothes, and I have to press it with both hands lest it escape me. If I perceive the object of my love at the end of an avenue, in the park, distance disappears at once and I know not what has become of the road: the devil has made off with it or I have wings. Nothing can take my thoughts from that form. Am I reading? — it comes in between the book and me. Do I ride? — I gallop at full speed, and fancy I feel in the rush of air its long hair mingling with mine, and its quick, warm breath on my cheek. That image haunts me, follows me everywhere, and is never more visible than when I do not see it.

You pitied me for that I did not love. Pity me now for that I do love, and chiefly for loving what

I love. Oh, the wretchedness of it! Oh, the fatal axe-stroke on a life already so maimed! What mad, guilty, odious passion has seized upon me! The shame of it reddens my brow with inextinguishable blush. Of all my aberrations this is the most deplorable; I cannot understand it; all in me is confused and upset. I know no longer who I am or what others are; I wonder whether I am man or woman; I hold myself in horror; strange, inexplicable feelings arise in me, and there are times when I feel as if my reason were leaving me and I lose all grasp of existence. For a long time I could not believe what had come to me; I watched and observed myself carefully; I tried to unravel the betwisted skein of the thought in my soul, and at last I discerned the dreadful truth, through all the veils in which it wrapped itself . . . Silvio, I am in love . . . Oh! no, I never can say it . . . I am in love with a man!

IX

IT is so. I am in love with a man, Silvio. Long did I try to blind myself to the truth, giving a different name to the feeling I experienced, clothing it in the garb of pure and disinterested friendship. I fancied it was but the admiration I feel for beautiful people and beautiful things; for days I wandered along the smiling and treacherous paths that wind about every nascent love, but now I see clearly into what a deep and terrible track I have turned. I cannot conceal it from myself: I have subjected myself to a rigid self-examination; I have coolly weighed every circumstance, reasoned out the minutest detail, probed my soul in every part with that accuracy that comes of the habit of self-study. I blush to think it, to write it, but the fact, alas! is but too evident: I love that youth, not with a friend's affection, but with a lover's ardour.

You whom I have so dearly loved, O Silvio, my trusty, my only comrade, you never awoke such feelings in me, and yet if ever there was under heaven a close and lively friendship, if ever two souls,

though different, thoroughly understood each other, that friendship was ours, those two souls were ours. What swift-winged hours have we not spent together! what endless talks, ever too soon ended, have we not had! what things have we not said to each other that are never said! In the heart of each of us there was that window Momus would have inserted in man's side. How proud I was of being your friend, — I who was younger than you, I who was so erratic, and you who were so sensible!

My feelings towards this youth are absolutely incredible; never has any woman so singularly moved me. The clear and silvery tone of his voice enervates and excites me strangely; my soul hangs upon his lips, as the bee lights on the flower, to suck in the honey of his words. I cannot touch him as I brush past without being thrilled from head to foot, and at night, when we part and he holds out his adorable hand, so soft, so satin-like, all my blood rushes to the spot he has touched, and an hour later I still feel the pressure of his fingers.

This morning I watched him a long time without being perceived by him. I was concealed behind my window-curtain, while he was at his window, which is

exactly opposite mine. This part of the mansion was built at the close of the reign of Henry IV., half of stone, half of brick, as was the fashion then. The window is tall and narrow, with stone lintel and balcony. Theodore — for you have already guessed that it was he — was leaning on the rail with a melancholy air and appeared to be deep in thought. A large, flowered, red-damask curtain, partly caught up, hung in broad folds behind him and formed a background. How handsome he was, and how splendidly his dark hair and pale face stood out against that deep red! Two thick locks of black, lustrous hair, like the bunches of grapes of the Erigone of the ancients, fell gracefully down his cheeks and framed in most charmingly the perfectly true oval contour of his fair face. His plump, rounded neck was quite bare, and he wore a sort of dressing-gown with wide sleeves that looked not unlike a woman's gown. In his hand he held a yellow tulip, that he pitilessly tore to bits while sunk in thought, and the petals of which he cast to the winds.

One of the luminous angles cast by the sun upon the wall was projected upon the window, and the picture was gilded with a warm, transparent tone which

the most shimmering painting of Giorgione might have envied.

His long hair, gently lifted by the breeze, his bare, white neck, his long gown drawn in round the waist, his lovely hands issuing from the sleeves like the pistils of a flower from out the petals, made him look, not the handsomest of men, but the most beautiful of women, and I said to myself, "It is a woman! oh! it is a woman!" Then I suddenly recollected a mad thing. I wrote you long ago — you remember — about my ideal love and the way in which I should certainly meet her: the fair lady in the Louis XIII park, the white and red *château*, the great terrace, the walks lined with old horse-chestnut trees and the glimpse of her at the window. I told you all that in detail. And this was it; what I beheld was the exact realisation of my dream; the very style of architecture, the effect of light, the kind of beauty, the colour and the character I had desired; nothing was lacking, only — the lady was a man, although I own that for the moment I had forgotten it completely.

I am convinced that Theodore is a woman in disguise; it is impossible that it should be otherwise. Beauty so excessive, even in a woman, is not virile

beauty, even if the man were Antinoüs, Hadrian's friend, or Alexis, Vergil's friend. She is a woman, by Jove! and I was a fool to worry myself as I have been doing. This settles the difficulty in the simplest possible way, and I am not so much of a monster as I believed.

God would never fringe the dirty eyelids of a man with such long, brown, silky lashes, or flush with such bright and soft carmine our ugly, thick-lipped, hairy mouths. Our bones, roughly cut out and set in, are not worth clothing in such white and delicate flesh; our bumpy craniums are not fit to be framed in the waves of such lovely hair.

O Beauty, we have been created only to love and worship thee, if we have found thee; to seek thee unceasingly in this world, if that good fortune has not been ours; but to possess thee, to be ourselves Beauty, that is given but to angels and women. Lovers, poets, painters, and sculptors, we all strive to build altars to thee; the lover in his mistress, the poet in his song, the painter on his canvas, the sculptor with his marble; but our everlasting despair is that we are unable to render palpable the beauty we feel, and that we are enclosed in a frame which does

not fulfil the ideal of the body which we know should be ours.

I once saw a young man who had stolen the body I ought to have had. The rascal was exactly what I would have liked to be. He had the beauty of my ugliness, and by his side I looked like a rough sketch of him. He was of my height, but better made and stronger; his figure resembled mine, but had an elegance and a nobility mine lacks. His eyes were of the same colour as mine, but his glance flashed as mine never will. His nose was cast in the same mould as mine; only, it seemed to have been retouched with the chisel of a skilful sculptor: his nostrils were more open and vigorous, the flat parts more sharply outlined, and his nose had about it something heroic which is utterly wanting in mine. It seemed as though nature had tried to make out of me this improved myself. I looked like the rough, corrected draft of the thought of which he was the beautifully written copy. When I saw him walk, stop, bow to ladies, sit or lie down, with the perfect grace which is the outcome of the beauty of proportion, I felt atrociously sad and jealous, as must feel the clay model which dries and cracks unnoticed in a

corner of the studio, while the proud marble statue — which but for the model would not exist — stands splendid upon its carved pedestal and attracts the attention and the praise of the visitors. For, after all, that rascal is only myself more successfully done, and cast in less rebellious bronze which has more accurately entered the hollows in the mould. It is pretty bold of him, I think, to parade around in the shape which is mine, and to be as insolent as if he were an original type; when all is said and done he is merely a plagiarist of me, for I was born before him and but for me nature would never have thought of turning him out as he is. When the ladies sang the praises of his fine manners and the charm of his person, I felt impelled to get up and say to them, "You fools, praise me to my face; for that gentleman is myself, and it is wasting time to say to him what is due to me." At other times I felt the liveliest desire to strangle him and to turn his soul out of that body which belonged to me; I used to prowl around him with tight-drawn lips and clenched fists, like a nobleman who prowls round his palace in which a family of rapscallions have settled during his absence, wondering how he will kick them out. The young man, in addition, is a fool, and therefore

meets with the greater success. And sometimes I envy his lack of brains more than his beauty. The Scriptural declaration concerning the poor in spirit is incomplete: the kingdom of heaven may be theirs, — that may be true or not, and I care not a fig which it is, — but undoubtedly theirs is the kingdom of this world; they have money and beautiful women, the only two things worth desiring on earth. Are you acquainted with a single clever man who is rich as well, or a loyal and meritorious fellow who has a passably good-looking mistress? Beautiful as Theodore is, I have nevertheless not coveted his beauty, and I had rather he had it than I.

Those strange loves of which the elegies of the poets of antiquity are full, and which caused us so much surprise and wonderment, are therefore likely and possible. When we translated those passages we substituted women's names for those we found in them. Juventius became Juventia, Alexis changed into Ianthe. The handsome lads became lovely maidens, and thus did we make over the monstrous seraglios of Catullus, Tibullus, Martial, and gentle Vergil. It was a very charming occupation, which merely proved how little we had penetrated the genius of antiquity.

I am a man of the time of Homer; the world in which I live is not mine, and I am not in touch with the society around me. Christ did not come for me; I am as much of a pagan as Alcibiades or Phidias. I have never gathered on Golgotha the flowers of the Passion, and the deep stream that flows from the open side of the Crucified One, girdling the world with blood, has not laved me; my rebellious body refuses to acknowledge the supremacy of the soul, and my flesh will not submit to be mortified. I think earth as fair as heaven, and virtue, to me, lies in the beauty of form. I care nothing for spirituality; I prefer a statue to a phantasm, and high noon to twilight. Three things delight me: gold, marble, and purple; brilliancy, solidity, and colour. Of these are my dreams made, and of these materials are built all the palaces I erect for my fancies. At times other dreams come to me — long trains of white horses, without harness or bridle, ridden by handsome naked young men who file past on a dark-blue background as on the frieze of the Parthenon, or lines of maidens crowned with bands, with tunics falling in straight folds, and ivory timbrels, who seem to be winding round an immense vase. Never any mist or vapour, never anything undefined or vague. There are

no clouds in my heaven, or if there be they are solid, chiselled clouds, made out of the marble splinters fallen from the statue of Jove. The sharp, clear-cut outlines of mountains break the sky line, and the sun, resting on one of the highest crests, opens wide its yellow lion's eye with the golden lids. The cicada chirps and sings; the ripe corn crackles; the shadow, defeated and overborne by the heat, draws together and creeps in to the foot of the trees: all blazes with light, shines again, is splendidly luminous. The least detail becomes marked and stands out boldly; every object takes on robust shape and colour.[1] There is no room there for the sappiness and dreaminess of Christian art. *That* is my world. In my landscapes the brooks flow in carved waves from a sculptured urn, and, amid the tall, green, sounding reeds, that recall the Eurotas, are seen the round, white hips of some naiad with glaucous hair. Diana passes through the dark oak forest, quiver on back, scarf flying in the wind, and buskins cross-laced. She is followed by her hounds and her harmoniously named nymphs. My pictures are painted in four tones, like those of the primitive masters, and often are only coloured *bassi-relievi*, for I love to touch with the finger what I have seen, and to follow the roundness of a con-

tour even in its slightest parts; I look at each thing from every point of view, and turn around it with a light in my hand. I have looked at love with the light of antiquity and as a more or less perfect piece of sculpture. What is the arm like? Fair. The hands are delicately shaped. What think you of this foot? I think the ankle lacks distinction and the heel is commonplace. But the breasts are well placed and shapely, the serpentine line undulates satisfactorily, the shoulders are plump and well formed. That woman would make a passable model, and several bits of her would be worth making moulds from. Let us love her.

That has always been the way with me. I look on women with the eye of the sculptor, not of the lover. All my life I have been deeply concerned with the shape of the flagon, never with the quality of its contents. Had Pandora's box been in my hands I believe I would not have opened it. I said a moment ago that Christ had not come for me; neither did Mary, the Star of the modern heaven, the gentle Mother of the glorious Child.

I have often stopped long under the stone foliage of the cathedrals, by the dim light of the stained-glass windows, at the time when the organ moaned of itself,

when an invisible finger lighted upon the keys and the wind blew in the pipes, and I have looked deep into the great pale-blue eyes of the Madonna. I have piously followed with my glance the emaciated oval of her face, the faint curve of her brows; I have admired her smooth, luminous forehead, her chastely transparent temples, her cheeks of sober and maidenly bloom softer than peach-blossom; I have counted each of the beautiful golden eyelashes which cast a quivering shadow; I have made out, in the half-light in which she is bathed, the vanishing lines of her delicate neck so modestly bent. Well, I must confess it, all that immaterial beauty, so airy, so vaporous that one feels it is about to vanish, moved me but little. I very greatly prefer Venus Anadyomene, — very greatly. The antique eyes drawn up at the corners, the lips so clean-cut and perfectly shaped, so amorous and so inviting to the kiss, the low, full forehead, the hair wavy as the sea and carelessly knotted behind the head, the smooth, shining shoulders, the back with its innumerable delightful curves, the small breasts, not too prominent, the rounded, even contours, the breadth of hip, the delicate strength, the mark of superhuman vigour in so adorably feminine a body,

— ravish and delight me to a degree you, the Christian and the sage, cannot have any idea of.

In spite of her affected air of humility, Mary is much too proud for me. Scarcely does the tip of her foot, wound round with linen bandages, touch the already paling globe on which writhes the ancient dragon. She has the loveliest eyes in the world, but they are always turned heavenwards or else cast down; never do they look straight at you — never has a human form been mirrored in them. Then I dislike the nimbus of smiling cherubs that are circled round her head in a golden haze. I am jealous of those tall young angels with floating hair and robes who press so amorously round her in her Assumptions; the hands which interlace in order to bear her up, the wings that flutter to fan her are unpleasant and annoying to me. These heavenly fops, so trig and triumphant, with their tunics of light, their wigs of golden threads, with their fine blue and green feathers, strike me as much too gallant.

Venus rises from the sea to enter the world, nude and alone, as beseems a deity who loves man. She prefers earth to Olympus, and has more men than gods for lovers. She does not wrap herself up in the veils of mysticism, but stands upright, her dolphin behind her,

and her foot upon a pearly shell; the sun's beams strike upon her polished waist, and her fair hand holds up the waves of her lovely hair in which Father Ocean has scattered his finest pearls. She is fully visible; she conceals nothing, for modesty is intended for the ugly alone, being a modern invention, sprung from the Christian contempt of form and matter.

O thou world of old, so all thou didst revere is now contemned; thine idols cast down in the dust; thy gods, so fair, so charming, displaced from their pedestals by emaciated anchorites in rags, and by blood-covered martyrs with shoulders torn by the wild beasts of thy circuses. Christ has wrapped the whole world in his shroud. Beauty has to blush at herself and take to a shroud too. Resume your tunics and your chlamydæ, handsome young men whose limbs are lustrous with oil and who wrestled in the lyceum or the gymnasium, under the splendid heavens, in the glorious sunshine of Attica, in the presence of the delighted crowd, and you, ye maidens of Sparta, that danced the bibasis and ran naked to the summit of Taygetus — for your reign is past. You too, who wrought the marble, and Prometheus-like gave life to bronze, break your chisels — there are to be no more sculptors. The tangible world

is dead. A dark and gloomy thought alone fills the vast void. Cleomene visits the weavers to note the folds of cloth and linen.

Virginity, thou bitter plant, sprung from a soil soaked with blood, thou whose puny, sickly flower scarce manages to bloom in the damp shades of the cloister under the cold lustral rain, thou scentless and thorny rose, thou hast taken the place of the beauteous, joyous roses bathed in spikenard and Falernian of the dancers of Sybaris!

Thou wert unknown to the ancient world, thou barren flower; never did it twine thee in its garlands of flowers that subtly intoxicated. In that vigorous, healthy world thou wouldst have been disdainfully trampled under foot. Virginity, mysticism, melancholy, — three unknown words, three diseases brought in by the Christ. You could never have set foot on that earth so full of indulgent and playful deities, ye pale spectres that flood our world with your icy tears, and that, leaning on a cloud, one hand in your breast, utter but the single words, "O Death! O Death!"

I look upon woman, as the ancients did, as a beautiful slave intended for our pleasure. Christianity has not rehabilitated her in my eyes. She remains, to me,

always a dissimilar, inferior thing which we adore and trifle with, a toy more intelligent than one of gold or silver and which gets up of itself if you let it fall. Because of this I have been told that I think ill of women, while I am of opinion, on the contrary, that I think very well of them.

I really cannot understand why women are so anxious to be looked upon as men. I can understand that one should wish to be a boa-constrictor, a lion, or an elephant, but that any one should wish to be a man passes my comprehension. Had I been present at the Council of Trent when the important question whether a woman is a man was being debated, I should assuredly have voted in the negative.

In the course of my life I have written a few love verses, or at least verses that claimed to be such. I have just re-read some; they are totally devoid of the feeling of modern love. If they were written in Latin distichs instead of French rimes, they might be mistaken for the work of an Augustan poetaster. And I wonder that the women for whom they were written were not angered outright by them, instead of being greatly pleased. It is true that women understand poetry about as well as do cabbages and roses — and

naturally enough, for they are themselves poetry, or at least the best poetical instruments. A flute neither hears nor understands the air which is played upon it.

In the aforesaid verses I have sung only of the golden or dusky hair, of the wondrous smoothness of the skin, of the rounded arms, of the small feet, and the exquisite modelling of the hands; and the poem ends with a humble request that the divinity addressed will speedily grant me the enjoyment of all these fine things. In the most brilliant passages there are nothing but wreaths hung at her door, showers of flowers, perfumes burned, Catullian additions of kisses, delightful sleepless nights, quarrels with Aurora, followed by injunctions to the said Aurora to go back and hide herself behind old Tithonus's saffron-coloured curtains — it is cold brilliancy, vibrationless sonority. The work is accurate, polished, wrought with even niceness, but through all the refinements and veils of the expression, the short, sharp voice of the master trying to soften itself as he addresses the slave is heard. It is not, as in the erotic poetry written since the Christian era, a soul beseeching another soul to love it because it loves; it is not a blue, smiling lake inviting a brook to mingle

with it and with it reflect the stars in heaven; it is not a pair of turtle doves spreading their wings together to fly to the same nest, but: "Cynthia, you are fair to look upon; hasten, then, for who knows whether you will see the morrow. Your hair is blacker than the lustrous skin of an Ethiopian maid; therefore delay not, for in a few years silver threads will begin to show in your luxuriant locks; these roses are sweet-scented to-day, to-morrow they will give out a death stench and be but the dead forms of roses. Let us breathe in your roses as long as they resemble your cheeks; let me kiss your cheeks until they resemble roses. When you are old, Cynthia, no one will care to have you, not even the lictor's valets would have you for pay, and you will run after me whom now you disdain. Wait until Saturn's nail has wrinkled your clear, shining brow, and you will see your threshold—now so full of suppliants, so besieged, so wetted with hot tears, so covered with flowers—avoided, cursed, overgrown with grass and brambles. Hasten then, Cynthia, for the least wrinkle may kill the strongest love."

The elegy of the ancients is summed up in that brutal and imperious formula: it always ends in this, its most excellent reason, its strongest, most Achillean

argument. It has little or nothing to say beyond this, and once it has promised a robe of byssus and a girdle of pearls of even size, it is done. And it is, after all, the best I too can find in similar circumstances. Not that I always keep to that rather meagre programme; I do embroider my narrow canvas with a few silken threads of different shades snatched here and there, but the threads are short or knotted together a score of times and hardly cling to the woof. I speak rather well on the subject of love because I have read many fine things about it. An actor's skill is all that is required, and with many women this seeming suffices. My habit of writing and imagining enables me to talk at length on the subject, and any fairly practised mind may, with application, easily obtain the same result. But I do not feel a single word I say, and I murmur, like the poet of antiquity, "Hasten, then, Cynthia."

I have often been charged with falsehood and hypocrisy, yet there lives not the man who would more gladly than I speak truthfully and lay bare his heart; but as I have not one idea, one feeling in common with the people who surround me, as the very first word I should speak truthfully would cause a general

hue and cry, I have preferred to keep silent, or, if I do speak, to utter only stupid commonplaces which everyone has agreed to believe in. A pretty reception I should get if I were to tell the ladies what I have just written you! I fancy they would not greatly approve my point of view and my way of looking upon love. As for men, I cannot go and say plump out to them, either, that they are wrong not to crawl on all-fours, though that is exactly my highest opinion of them. I do not care to have a quarrel picked with me about every word I utter, for after all what matters it what I think or do not think, whether I am sad when I look gay, happy when I seem melancholy? No one objects to my not going about naked; may I not dress up my face as I dress up my body? Why should a mask be more reprehensible than a pair of breeches,—a lie than a pair of stays?

Alas! the earth spins round the sun, and one side of it is burning hot and the other icy cold. A battle is fought in which six hundred thousand men hack each other to pieces; the weather is most lovely; the flowers are amazingly coquettish, they unblushingly expose their rich bosoms under the very hoofs of the chargers. To-day innumerable good deeds have been

done, and it is pouring rain, snowing, thundering, lightening, hailing — you would think the world was coming to an end. The benefactors of humanity are up to their eyes in mud and as dirty as curs, unless they can afford to keep a carriage. Creation jeers pitilessly at the creature and constantly launches the bitterest sarcasms at it. Everything is indifferent to everything else, and lives or vegetates in accordance with its own particular law. What do the sun, beet-roots, or men, even, care whether I do one thing or another, whether I live or die, whether I am happy or wretched, true or false? A bit of straw falls on an ant and breaks its third leg at the second joint; a cliff crashes down upon a village and destroys it: I do not believe the golden-eyed stars weep any more over the one than over the other of these catastrophes. You are my dearest friend, assuming that that word is not merely a hollow deception; suppose I were to die, it is plain that, however deeply grieved you might be, you would not go without your dinner even two days running, and that, notwithstanding the awful disaster, you would go on playing backgammon very pleasantly. What friend, what mistress of mine would, twenty years hence, remember my family and my Christian

names, or know me in the street if I happened to go along with a coat out at the elbows? Forgetfulness and nothingness — there is man for you.

I feel as absolutely alone as it is possible to be, and all the threads which bound me to things and bound things to me have snapped, one after another. There are few instances of a man who, having preserved a knowledge of the motions within himself, has reached such a point of brutishness. I am like those flasks of wine which have been left uncorked, and from which the spirits have been completely evaporated. The liquor retains its appearance and colour, but when tasted it is insipid as water.

The rapidity of this process of decay terrifies me when I reflect upon it. If it keeps on at its present rate I shall have to be pickled, or I shall infallibly rot and the worms will attack me, for I no longer possess a soul, and the possession of the soul is the only difference between a living body and a dead one. It is not more than a twelvemonth since I still had something of human about me; I was excited, I looked around; I had a favourite thought, a sort of aim, an ideal; I wished to be loved; I dreamed the dreams of my age, though, to be sure, they were more distinct and less

chaste than those of ordinary youths, but nevertheless kept within due bounds. Little by little what there was in me of spiritual became detached and vanished, and there was nothing left but a thick deposit of ugly slime. The dream turned into a nightmare, the chimera into an incubus; the ivory gates of the spiritual world were closed to me. Now I cannot understand what I cannot handle; my dreams are earthy; everything condenses and hardens around me; nothing floats or wavers any more; all is airless, breathless; matter presses in upon me, enters into me, crushes me. I am like a pilgrim who has fallen asleep on a summer's day with his feet in the water, and who awakens on a winter's day with his legs caught and encased in ice. I no longer wish to be friend or lover to any one; glory itself, that dazzling halo which I had so coveted for my brows, does not excite the least desire in me. Alas! there is but one thing alive in me — the horrible desire which attracts me to Theodore. To this have come all my notions of morality: what is physically beautiful is good; what is ugly is evil. If I were to see a beautiful woman whom I should know to be the greatest scoundrel on earth, an adulteress and a poisoner, I confess I should not care a straw, and it would not

prevent my taking my pleasure with her provided the shape of her nose satisfied me.

Here is my idea of supreme happiness: a large square building, windowless on its outer faces; a great court surrounded by a colonnade of white marble; in the centre a crystal-clear fountain with a quicksilver-like jet in the Arab fashion; orange and pomegranate trees in boxes alternating with one another, and over all a very blue sky and a very brilliant sun. Here and there great sharp-nosed greyhounds asleep; from time to time barefooted negroes, with golden anklets, and handsome, lissome, white-skinned maids dressed in rich and fanciful garments passing between the open arcades, a basket on their arm or an amphora on their head. Myself — motionless and silent under a magnificent dais, with piles of squares of carpet around me, a huge lion for an elbow-rest, and the bare bosom of a young slave for a footstool, — smoking opium in a big jade-stone pipe.

That is my idea of heaven, and if God is good enough to want me to go there after my death, he will have a little kiosk built for me in some corner on the above plan. Paradise as usually described strikes me as much too musical, and I humbly confess my

inability to bear up under a sonata, even if it last only ten thousand years.

Now you know what is my El Dorado, my Promised Land, — a dream like unto any other dream, but having this peculiarity, that never do I introduce into it any known face; that not a single one of my friends has ever crossed the threshold of that imaginary palace; that none of the women I have possessed have ever sat down beside me there on the velvet cushions; I am alone in it amid ghosts. It has never once occurred to me to love any of the women, any of the dainty, shadowy maidens with whom I people it, nor have I ever fancied that any one of them was in love with me. In the seraglio of my fancy I have no favourite sultana. There are negresses and mulatto women, blue-skinned and red-haired Jewesses, Greek and Circassian, Spanish and English beauties, but they are only symbols of colour and form to me, and I have them just as one has all sorts of wines in one's cellar and all sorts of humming-birds in one's collection. They are instruments of pleasure, pictures that need no frame, statues that come to you when you call them and you desire to view them from a nearer point. A woman possesses an undoubted advantage over a statue; she turns of

herself in the direction you desire, while with a statue you have to walk round it to get the right point of view, and that is tiring.

You readily perceive that, holding such views, it is impossible for me to remain in this age or in this world; for it is out of the question to exist thus outside of time and space. I must find something else.

Such a train of thought leads naturally and logically to this conclusion. Because one seeks only to satisfy the eye with the beauty of form and the perfection of outline, one welcomes them wherever found. And thus are explained the curious aberrations of love in antiquity.

Since the days of Christ there has not been produced a single statue of a man in which the beauty of adolescence is idealised and reproduced with the carefulness characteristic of the sculptors of antiquity. Woman has become the type of moral and physical beauty; man really fell from his high estate on the day the Child was born in Bethlehem. Woman is creation's queen; the stars form a crown for her head; the crescent of the moon glories in the fact that it curves beneath her feet, the sun yields its purest gold to make gems for her, the painters who wish to flatter

angels give them women's faces, and I assuredly do not blame them for doing so. But it was quite otherwise before the coming of the gentle and gallant teller of parables; if a god or a hero was to be made attractive, he was not womanised; gods and heroes alike had a type of their own, at once vigorous and delicate, but always virile, however tender their contours, however polished and lacking in muscles and veins the workman had made their divine legs and arms. The special character of feminine beauty was rather brought to conform with this type; the shoulders were broadened, the hips narrowed, the chest was more ample, the joints of the arms and thighs stood out more strongly. There is not much difference between Paris and Helen, and for this reason Hermaphrodite was one of the chimeras most ardently caressed by idolatrous antiquity.

And in sooth the son of Hermes and Aphrodite is one of the most graceful creations of the genius of antiquity. It is impossible to imagine anything more exquisite than these two perfect forms, mingling harmoniously one with the other, these two beauties, so equal and so different, which make but one superior to both individually, because they temper and set off

each other. Can there be any more delightful indecision, to the exclusive admirer of form, than that caused by the sight of that back, of those strange loins, of those legs at once so delicate and so strong that one hesitates to say whether they belong to Mercury about to take his flight or to Diana issuing from the bath? The torso is a composite of the most delectable monstrosities: on the plump, full bosom of the youth swell with strange grace a maiden's breasts. Under the rounded waist, thoroughly feminine in its softness, one readily guesses the presence of the angles and the ribs of a youth's waist; the stomach is somewhat flattened for a woman's, somewhat too rounded for a man's, and the whole appearance of the body has something vague and undecided which it is impossible to express, and which is peculiarly attractive. Theodore would undoubtedly be an excellent model of this type of beauty; yet I am of opinion that in him the feminine side is the stronger, and that he is nearer to Salmacis than to the Hermaphrodite of the "Metamorphoses."

The curious thing is that I scarcely ever think of his sex now, and that I love him with a feeling of perfect security. Sometimes I endeavour to persuade

myself that this love is abominable, and I repeat it to myself in the strongest terms; but the remonstrance is but empty sound; it is but a reasoning I indulge in and do not feel the force of. Loving him seems to me the most natural thing in the world, and what any one else would do in my place.

I watch him, I hear him play or sing, for he is a delightful singer, and I enjoy all this wondrously. So much does he impress me as being a woman that one day, in the excitement of conversation, I happened to call him madam, whereupon he broke into what struck me as a rather forced laugh.

But suppose he is a woman, what is the reason which has led him to assume this disguise? I cannot fathom it, try as I may. I can readily understand that a very young, very handsome and quite beardless gentleman should disguise himself as a woman, for many a door that would otherwise be fast closed is opened to him, and the false seeming may lead him into the most labyrinthine and amusing complication of adventures. It is a way of reaching a woman who is closely guarded, or of forcing a success thanks to the surprise. But I do not see what benefit can accrue to a young and beautiful woman who roams the country

round in men's habiliments; she is bound to be a loser by it. A woman ought not to give up in that way the pleasure of being courted, sung in madrigals and worshipped; she would rather give up life itself, and she would be quite right, for what is woman's life worth if these be wanting? It is nothingness — nay, it is worse than death. The fact that women who have reached their thirtieth year or who have had small-pox do not throw themselves down from the top of a steeple has always excited the greatest wonder in me.

All the same, something more powerful than all these reasons calls out to me that Theodore is a woman, the woman of my dreams, the woman I am to love exclusively, and who will love no man but me. Yes, it is she, the eagle-eyed goddess with the fair regal hands, who smiled condescendingly on me from her cloud-throne. She has come to me in this disguise to try me; to see whether I would recognise her, whether my love-glance would penetrate through the veils in which she has wrapped herself, as in those fairy tales in which your fairy first shows up as a beggar-maid, then suddenly draws herself up splendidly adorned with gold and jewels.

But I did know you, O my love! At sight of you my heart leaped up within me as did the child John in Saint Elizabeth's womb when the Virgin visited her. Flame filled the air, and the smell of divine ambrosia; I saw at your feet the trail of fire, and I knew at once you were no ordinary mortal.

The melodious sounds of Saint Cecilia's viola that the angels listen to with rapture are harsh and discordant compared with the pearly cadences that issue from your ruby lips; the young and smiling Graces tread an unending measure around you; when you pass through the woodland the warbling birds bend their crested heads, the better to see you, and break into their loveliest song. The amorous moon rises earlier to kiss you with her pale, silvery lips, for she has forsaken Endymion for you; the wind refrains from effacing the delicate imprint of your adorable feet; when you bend over the spring, the water becomes smoother than crystal lest it wrinkle and deform the reflection of your heavenly features; the modest violets themselves open out their little hearts to you and coquette before you; the jealous strawberry is filled with emulation and strives to equal the divine crimson of your lips; the imperceptible midge joyously buzzes and applauds

you with the beating of its wings — all Nature loves and admires you, for you are Nature's fairest work!

At last I live! Until now I was but a dead man; now I have cast off my shroud and from the grave I uplift to the sun my two thin hands; my earthy, spectral hue is gone; my blood flows swiftly in my veins. At last the frightful silence that reigned around me is broken, and the dark opaque vault that pressed down on my head is illumined. Innumerable mysterious voices whisper in my ear; exquisite stars sparkle above me and scatter on my winding path spangles of gold; the daisies smile sweetly on me and the blue bells whisper my name with their little twisted tongues. I understand many a thing I had never understood; I discover amazing affinities and sympathies; I comprehend the language of the rose and the nightingale, and as I run I read the book I could not even spell out. In the respectable old oak, covered with mistletoe and parasitic plants, I find I had an old friend, and that the languorous and frail periwinkle, whose great blue eye ever overflows with tears, has long nourished a discreet and restrained love for me. Love, love it is that has struck the scales from mine eyes and given me the solution of the riddle. Love descended into

the depths of the dungeon wherein languished my crouching, sleepy soul; it took it by the hand and made it climb the steep and narrow stair that led to the outside air. All the doors were burst open and for the first time that poor Psyche emerged from the Me in which it had been imprisoned.

Another life has become mine. I breathe through another, and should a thrust wound her it would kill me. Before this happy day I was like those gloomy Japanese idols that ever gaze upon their belly. I watched myself; I was the audience that sat at the play I was performing; I observed myself live, and listened to the beat of my heart as to the ticking of a clock. That was all. Images touched my careless eyes; sounds fell upon my heedless ear, but naught of the outer world reached my soul. No one's life was necessary to me; I even doubted if any one but myself existed, and was not very sure that I did. I seemed to stand alone in the universe and all the rest appeared to be but a vapour and images, empty illusions and fleeting apparitions destined to people this nothingness. But now, what a difference!

Yet what if my presentiment deceives me, and Theodore be really a man, as every one believes him to be!

Such marvellous beauty is not unexampled, and great youth sometimes aids the illusion. I will not allow my thoughts to dwell on this possibility; it would drive me mad. The seed that fell on the sterile rock of my heart but yesterday has already sent its numberless filaments into it in every direction; it clings firmly to it, and it would be impossible to drag it out. It is already a tree with its bloom and leaves, its strong twisting roots. Were I to learn to a certainty that Theodore is not a woman, I know not, alas! whether I should not still love him.

X

MY lovely friend, you were indeed right to oppose my project to see men and to study them thoroughly before giving my heart to any one of them. I have forever destroyed in myself, not love only, but the very possibility of being in love.

We girls are to be pitied, brought up as we are with so much care and so modestly surrounded with a triple wall of precautions and reticence; we who are not permitted to hear or suspect anything, and whose chief knowledge is that we do not know anything. In what strange error do we live, and how treacherous are the illusions which cradle us in their arms!

Ah! Graciosa, thrice accursed be the instant when I bethought myself of this disguise. What abominable, infamous, coarse things have I been compelled to witness or listen to! What a wealth of chaste and priceless ignorance I have spent in a brief time!

It was on a lovely moonlight night, do you remember? We were strolling together at the very end of the garden, in that dull and lonesome walk at one end

of which stands the statue of the flute-playing Faun, whose nose is gone and whose whole body is covered with a thick coat of blackish moss, while at the other end there is an artificial landscape sketched on the wall and half effaced by the rains. Through the yet young foliage of the shrubbery we could see here and there the glint of the stars and the silvery curve of the crescent moon. The scent of young shoots and growing plants was wafted to us from the flower-garden on the faint breath of a gentle air. A bird, hidden somewhere, sang a strange, languorous air, and we, like true girls that we were, talked of love and lovers, of marriage, of the handsome cavalier we had seen at mass. We put together the little we knew of the world and of things in general; we turned over and over a remark overheard by chance, the meaning of which seemed obscure and strange to us; we put to each other an endless number of those absurd questions which innocence alone can suggest. Oh, what primitive poesy, what adorable nonsense there was in these furtive talks of two foolish little girls fresh from their convent school!

You wanted for a lover a bold, proud young man, with black hair and moustaches, great spurs, long feath-

ers, a long sword, a sort of amorous swashbuckler, and you were full of the heroic and the triumphant, dreaming but of duels, escalades, and miraculous devotion. You would willingly have thrown your glove into the lion's den to have your Esplandianus fetch it out again, and it was comical to hear the fair-haired, blushing, yielding little maiden you were then spout these brave tirades at a breath and with the most martial air.

For me, though but six months older, I was less romantic by six years. What I chiefly desired to know was what men said to each other and what they did when they had left the drawing-room or the theatre. I felt that there was many a defective and obscure side to their life, kept carefully concealed from us, and with which it was important that we should be acquainted. Sometimes, concealed behind a curtain, I watched from a distance the gentlemen who came to our house, and I fancied I then detected in their ways something ignoble and cynical, a coarse carelessness or a brutal preoccupation, which I failed to find as soon as they entered and which they seemed to throw off in some magical way on the threshold of the room. Every one, young and old, appeared to have

uniformly adopted a conventional mask, conventional sentiments, and conventional speech when they were with women. From the corner of the drawing-room in which I sat up straight as a doll, without leaning back in my arm-chair, and while I turned my bouquet in my hands, I looked and listened, keeping my eyes cast down nevertheless, but seeing everything on the right and the left, before and behind me. My glance, like the fabled glance of the lynx, pierced the walls, and I could have told what was going on in the next room.

I had also remarked a notable difference in the way married women were spoken to. In place of the discreet, polite, frivolously pretty speeches addressed to me and my companions, I noted freer playfulness, less reserved, bolder ways, a reticence easily interpreted, and turns coming quickly to the point, — all indicative of a corruption that knew well it was dealing with corruption like unto itself. I felt unmistakably that there was something in common between them and not between us, and I would have given anything to know what it was.

Eagerly and with furious curiosity I followed with eye and ear the buzzing, laughing groups of young

men who, after having stopped at some point of the circle of visitors, resumed their walk talking and casting ambiguous glances as they passed. On their lips disdainfully puffed out, fluttered incredulous sneers; they seemed to mock at what they had just said and to take back the compliments and the adulation they had just showered upon us. I could not hear their words, but I understood by the motion of their lips that they were speaking words of a language unknown to me, and which no one had ever made use of in my presence. The very ones who seemed the most humble and submissive lifted their heads with an unmistakable air of revolt and weariness; a sigh of relief, like that of an actor who has got to the end of a long tirade, escaped them in spite of themselves, and as they left us they spun round on their heels in a quick, hurried way which denoted a sort of internal satisfaction at being freed from the burdensome task of being decent and polite.

I would have given a year of my life to hear, unseen, their talk for an hour. I often made out from certain attitudes, from gestures half concealed, from side glances, that I was the subject of conversation and that my age or my face was being discussed.

Then I was on hot coals; the few muttered words, the bits of sentences which at times reached me excited my curiosity in the highest degree without satisfying it, and threw me into the strangest uncertainty and perplexity.

What was being said generally appeared to be favorable to me, but this did not trouble me one way or the other. I cared little enough whether I was thought handsome or not, but the stray whispered remarks, almost always followed up by a long snigger and curious winks — what these meant was what I should have liked to know. To hear plainly one of these speeches spoken low behind a curtain or by a door corner, I would have given up without regret the most flowery and perfumed conversation in the world.

If I had had a lover, I should have greatly desired to know how he spoke of me to another man, and in what language he would have boasted of his success to his companions in debauch, once he was a little bit intoxicated and leant on his elbows on the table.

Now I know it, and right sorry am I to know it. That is always the way.

It was a crazy notion of mine, but what is done is done, and one cannot forget what one has learned. I

did not listen to you, dear Graciosa, and I am very sorry for it; but we do not always heed reason, especially when it speaks with such a pretty mouth as yours, for, I know not why, we cannot think a piece of advice sound unless it is given by some old grey-beard, — just as if sixty years of stupidity made one clever.

But all this business worried me overmuch and I could not stand it longer; I was burning with desire to know. The fatal apple was growing riper in the foliage above my head, and I was bound to have a bite out of it, even if I had to throw it away afterwards should it prove to be bitter.

I have done as did my very dear grandmother Eve: I have had a bite.

The death of my uncle, my only remaining relative, leaving me free to act as I pleased, I carried out my long cherished dream. I had taken the greatest precautions to prevent any one suspecting my sex. I had learned to use sword and pistol; I was a perfect rider, and a bolder one than most men; I applied myself to wearing my cloak with the proper set and switching my riding-whip in the correct way, and in the course of a few months I managed to transform a rather pretty

girl into a much handsomer young gentleman, who lacked scarce anything but a moustache. I turned my possessions into cash and left the city, resolved to return to it only when I should have acquired the fullest experience of men.

That was the only way to clear up my doubts; to have had lovers would not have taught me anything, or at least would have but partially informed me. What I wanted was to study man thoroughly, to dissect him in the minutest detail with an inexorable knife, and to have him living and quivering on my operating-table. To do this, it was necessary to see him alone in his home, in his free and easy ways, to follow him on his walks, into the pot-houses, and elsewhere. Thanks to my disguise, I could go everywhere without being noticed; nothing was concealed from me; all reserve, all constraint vanished; I was made the depositary of confidences and myself made imaginary ones to call out true ones. Alas! women have read the romance of man, never his history.

It is awful to think, but we never do think, how profoundly ignorant we are of the life and conduct of the men who appear to love us and whom we shall marry by and by. Their real life is as thoroughly un-

known to us as if they were inhabitants of Saturn or any other planet hundreds of millions of miles from this sub-lunar world of ours; they seem to belong to another species; there is not the least intellectual bond between the two sexes; virtues in the one are vices in the other, and men are admired for doing what causes women to be ostracised.

The life of us girls, on the contrary, is perfectly plain and may be seen at a glance. It is quite easy to follow us from the home to the boarding-school, and back from the boarding-school to the home. What we do is patent to every one; for all may see our wretched stump-drawings; our bouquets in water-colours, composed of a rose the size of a cabbage, and of a pansy, the stems tastefully tied with a ribbon of tender hue; the slippers we embroider for father's birthday, or grandfather's, have nothing occult or suspicious about them. We perform our sonatas and our romances with the most desirable coldness. We are duly and carefully tied to our mother's apron-strings, and at nine or ten o'clock at latest we get back into our dear little white beds, in our clean and discreet little rooms, into which we are virtuously bolted and padlocked until the following morning. The liveliest, the most jealous

susceptibility could find nothing to object to in all this. The most transparent of crystal is not as transparent as such a life.

Whoever takes us knows what we have been doing from the moment we were weaned, and even before, if he choose to carry his researches so far. We do not live, we vegetate like moss and flowers; the icy shadow of the maternal stem falls ever upon us, poor, repressed rosebuds that dare not open. Our main business is to sit up straight, with stays laced tight, with eyes properly cast down, and to be more motionless and stiff than lay figures and squeaking dolls.

We are forbidden to speak first, to take any part in conversation save to answer "yes" or "no," if we are asked a question. As soon as something interesting is to be said we are sent off to practise the harp or the piano, and our music-teachers are all sixty years old at least and take snuff to excess. The models hung in our rooms are most vague and elusive in their anatomy. The gods of Greece, when they are to enter a young ladies' boarding-school, take care first to purchase at some second-hand clothier's very full overcoats and to have their portraits engraved in mezzotint, which makes them look like janitors

or hackney cabmen, and does not conduce to inflame our imagination.

By dint of guarding against our becoming romanesque, they make idiots of us. The time of our education is spent, not in teaching us something, but in preventing our learning something.

We are really prisoners, body and soul. But a young man, master of his actions, who goes out in the morning not to come back before next day, who has money, who can earn it and do with it what he pleases, how could he justify the employment of his time? What man is there who would tell his love all he did during the day and during the night? There is not one, not even among those who are reputed to be purest.

I had sent my horse and clothes to a small farmhouse I own not far from the town. I dressed, sprang into the saddle, and off I went, not without a curious sinking of the heart. I regretted nothing, I left no one behind, — neither relatives nor friends, neither cat nor dog, — and yet I was sad and tears almost came to my eyes. The farmhouse itself which I had visited but five or six times was nothing in particular to me, and I did not feel for it that attachment we feel for certain

places, and which causes emotion in us when we have to leave them; yet I turned round two or three times to watch once more from afar the blue spiral of smoke that rose from it through the trees.

It was in that house that I had left my woman's name, together with my gowns and petticoats. In the room where I had changed my dress were put away twenty years of my life which no longer counted and no longer concerned me. Above the door might have been inscribed, "Here lies Magdalen de Maupin;" for, in truth, I was no longer Magdalen de Maupin, but Theodore de Sérannes, and henceforth no one would call me by the sweet name of Magdalen.

The drawer in which were put away my gowns, henceforth useless, appeared to me as the grave of my fair illusions. I was a man, at least I looked a man; the girl was dead.

When I finally lost sight of the tops of the chestnut trees that surround the farmhouse, I seemed to be no longer myself, but some one else, and I recalled my former actions as if they were those of a stranger which I had beheld, or as the beginning of a novel I had not finished reading. I complacently recalled a thousand little details, the childish artlessness of which called to

my lips a smile of indulgence, of mocking indulgence at times, like that of a young libertine listening to the Arcadian and pastoral confidences of a schoolboy; and at the very time at which I was parting from them forever, all the puerilities I had indulged in as a little girl and a maiden ran to the roadside making friendly signs to me and blowing kisses to me with their white taper fingers.

I spurred my horse to escape from these enervating emotions; the trees flashed rapidly by on the right and on the left, but the mad swarm, buzzing louder than a hive of bees, began to course down the side walks and call out to me, "Magdalen! Magdalen!"

A smart blow from my riding-whip caused my horse to double its speed. So rapid was my pace that my hair blew out almost straight behind me; my cloak assumed a horizontal line, and the folds of it looked as though they were carved in stone. Once I looked back and saw, a little white cloud far upon the horizon, the dust raised by my horse's hoofs.

I pulled up.

In a wild-rose bush, on the edge of the road, I saw something white moving, and a little clear, silvery, sweet voice struck on my ear,—

"Magdalen, Magdalen, whither are you faring so far, Magdalen? I am your maidenhood, dear child, and therefore wear a white robe and a white wreath and am white-skinned. But why are you booted, Magdalen? My impression is you had a very pretty foot. Boots and trunk-hose on you, and a great beaver with a feather, like a cavalier bound for the wars! Why that long sword which slaps and bruises your leg? You are strangely got up, Magdalen, and I am not sure whether I ought to accompany you."

"Go back home if you are afraid, my dear; water my flowers and look after my doves. But really you would be wrong, for you will be safer under these garments cut out of stout cloth than under your own gauze and linen. My boots prevent my shapely feet being seen, the sword defends me, and the feather that waves in my hat is there to frighten away all the nightingales that might sing in my ear deceitful songs of love."

I proceeded on my way. In the sighing of the wind I seemed to recognise the last phrase of the sonata I had learned for my uncle's anniversary, and in a great rose which raised its full bloom above a low wall, the model of the big rose which I had so often drawn in water-colours; and as I passed in front of a house I

saw floating at a window the ghosts of my own curtains. My whole past seemed to cling to me to try to prevent me from going on into a new future.

Two or three times I hesitated and turned my horse the other way, but the little blue adder of curiosity softly whispered insidious words and said to me: "Go on, go on, Theodore; this is a good opportunity to learn. If you do not do it this time, you never will. Are you going to give away that great heart of yours at haphazard, at the first seeming of honesty and passion? Men conceal very extraordinary secrets from us, Theodore."

And away I went again at a gallop.

Unquestionably it was my body, and not my mind that wore the trunk-hose; I experienced a certain uneasiness and, as it were, a shudder of fear at a dark place in the forest; a shot fired by a poacher nearly made me faint. Had it been a highwayman, I am sure the pistols in my holsters and my formidable sword would not have been of much service. But little by little I became hardened and never thought twice of such a matter.

The sun was slowly sinking on the horizon like the lamp of a theatre that is lowered at the close of the

performance. Rabbits and pheasants crossed the road from time to time; the shadows lengthened and the distance was growing redder. Parts of the sky were of the palest and tenderest lilac, others citron and orange; the night-birds began to sing and many a strange noise arose from the wood; the little remaining light died out and the darkness became dense, rendered still more opaque by the shadow of the trees. And here was I, who had never gone out alone at night, all by myself in a great forest at eight in the evening! Can you fancy that, Graciosa? Can you believe it of me, who was scared to death at the end of the garden? Fear swayed me more than ever, my heart beat loud, and I own that it was with much satisfaction that I saw peep out and shine on the other side of a slope the lights of the town to which I was bound. As soon as I saw these brilliant dots, like stars on earth, my fear vanished completely. It was as though these indifferent lights were the open eyes of so many friends watching over me.

My horse was no less well-pleased than I, and, scenting a pleasant stable-smell, sweeter to him than the scent of daisies and wild strawberries, he made straight for the Red Lion inn.

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A golden light shone through the lead-encased windows of the inn, the tin sign of which swung to and fro, plaining like an old woman, for the breeze was beginning to freshen. I handed my horse over to an hostler and entered the kitchen.

A huge fireplace opening wide its red and black maw at the back, swallowed up a whole faggot at a time, and on either side of the andirons two dogs, seated on their rumps, and almost as big as a man, were cooking before the fire in the most phlegmatic way, merely lifting their paws and uttering a whimper when the heat became too intense; but they would undoubtedly have preferred to be done to a coal to drawing back a single step.

My in-coming did not seem to please them, and I vainly endeavoured to get acquainted with them by patting and stroking their heads time and again. They cast sidelong glances at me that boded no good; whereat I was astonished, for animals willingly come to me.

The host approached and asked me what I wished for supper. He was pot-bellied, red-nosed, green-eyed, and wore a smile that went clean round his head. At every word he spoke he exhibited a double row of sharp teeth, separated like those of ogres. The big

kitchen-knife hanging at his side had a suspicious look and might be turned to various uses. When I had told him what I wanted, he went to one of the dogs and kicked it. The dog rose and entered a sort of wheel, with a piteous, suffering air, casting the while a reproachful glance at me. At last, seeing no respite was to be looked for, he began to turn the wheel in which he was shut up, and consequently the spit on which was stuck the chicken for my supper. I promised myself to let him have the bones for his trouble, and I began to note the appearance of the kitchen while waiting for the chicken to be cooked.

The ceiling was a network of great oak beams, browned and blackened by the smoke of the fire and of the candles. On the sideboards shone out of the shadow tin dishes more brilliant than silver, and white crockery-ware sprigged with blue. Along the walls lines of highly polished stewpans looked much like the bucklers hung in rows outside Greek or Roman triremes (forgive, Graciosa, the epic magnificence of this comparison). One or two stout kitchen wenches were busy around a long table, and were laying plates and forks, — a music more agreeable than any other when you are hungry, for the stomach then develops a keener

sense of hearing than the ear itself. On the whole, spite of the gap-mouth and the wolf-teeth of the host, the appearance of the inn was honest and pleasant enough, and had the innkeeper's mouth been a yard wide and his teeth thrice as long and shining, the rain was by this time sluicing the windows and the wind howling in a way to destroy any thought of departure; for to my mind there is nothing more gloomy than the moaning of the wind on a dark and rainy night.

A thought which occurred to me made me smile; it was that no one would have dreamt of looking for me here. Who, indeed, would have fancied that little Magdalen, instead of being in her nice warm bed, her alabaster night-light near her, a novel under her pillow, and her maid in the next room ready to run in on the least night alarm, was rocking on a straw-bottomed chair in a country inn, sixty miles from home, her booted feet on the fender and her small hands cavalierly stuck in her pockets?

For Magdalen has not remained, like her companions, lazily leaning on her elbow on the balcony rail, between the morning glories and the jessamine that climb over the window, watching, at the other end of

the plain, the violet fringes of the horizon or a rose-coloured cloudlet, rounded off by the May breeze. She has not hung mother-of-pearl palaces with lily leaves to make a home for her fancies; nor, like you, fair dreamers, invested some phantom figure with all imaginable perfections; she resolved to know men before giving herself to a man; she has left everything, her lovely, rich-coloured silk and velvet dresses, her necklaces and bracelets, her birds and her flowers; she has voluntarily renounced the worship of herself, the prostrations of lovers, the bouquets and the madrigals, the pleasure of being considered lovelier and better dressed than you, her sweet woman's-name, all that she was, in a word, and she has gone off alone, the brave girl that she is, to learn in the world itself the great science of life.

If people knew that, they would say I am crazy. You said it yourself, dear Graciosa; but the women who are really crazy are those who throw their soul to the winds and scatter their love at haphazard on rocks and stones without knowing whether a single grain will ever spring up.

O Graciosa, I have never thought without terror of the possibility of loving a man unworthy of my love,

of baring my soul to impure eyes, of allowing a profane being to enter into the sanctuary of my heart, of letting for a time the clear waters of my love run side by side with muddy waters. However complete the separation, something of the slime remains and the brook never regains its pristine limpidity.

To think that a man has embraced you, touched you, seen your body, and may say, "She is this or that; she has such a mark at such a place; her soul is so and so; her dream is this or that; this makes her laugh, and that weep; I have in my pocket-book a feather from the wing of her fancy; this ring is made of her hair; thus did she caress me, and this was a usual expression of endearment with her"!

Ah! Cleopatra, I understand now why you caused to be slain, when morning came, the lover with whom you had spent the night. Sublime cruelty, which once I imprecated. How well you knew human nature, you queen among voluptuous women, and what depth of thought there was in your barbarity. No living man was to divulge the mystery of your bed; the love words spoken by your lips were not to be repeated. 'T was thus you preserved your illusion pure. Experience did not strip bit by bit the lovely phantom

you had clasped in your arms. You preferred to be parted by one fell stroke of the axe than by long disgust. And rightly, for what a torture it is to find the chosen one prove every moment untrue to one's idea of him; to discover in his character a thousand pettinesses unsuspected heretofore; to perceive that what had seemed so fair when beheld through love's glass is really very ugly, and that the supposed hero of your novel is, after all, but a prosaic man who wears slippers and a dressing-gown.

I do not possess Cleopatra's power, and did I possess it, I should certainly not have the nerve to use it. So being both unable and unwilling to have my lovers decapitated on their leaving my couch, and also not being willing to bear with what other women bear, I must look twice to it before having a lover, and three or four times rather than twice, if the fancy for a lover takes me, which I rather doubt, after what I have seen and heard, unless I happen to meet in some blessed unknown land a heart kin to mine, as the novels have it, — a pure and virgin heart that has never yet loved, and which is capable of loving in the true meaning of the word. But that is no easy matter.

Several gentlemen entered the inn; the darkness and storm had prevented their pursuing their journey. They were all young, the eldest being certainly not over thirty. Their dress showed them to belong to the upper classes, and if their dress had not done so, the insolent familiarity of their manners would have made it plain enough. One or two were interesting-looking; the rest all exhibited more or less plainly that sort of brutal joviality and careless good-fellowship which mark men among themselves and which they wholly lay aside when they are with us.

If they had by any chance suspected that the slim youth half asleep on a chair in the chimney corner was far from being what he seemed, but a young girl in reality, a choice morsel, as they say, their tone would have changed with startling suddenness. They would have swelled out and shown off; they would have drawn near with many a low bow, toes turned out, elbows squared, a smile in the glance, on the lips, nose, hair, in all the attitude of the body. They would have picked their words and spoken softly and fair; at my least movement they would have made as though they would turn into carpets before me, lest my delicate feet should be hurt by the unevenness of the

floor; every hand would have been put out to assist me, and the softest seat placed in the cosiest corner; but I looked to be a pretty youth, not a pretty girl.

I confess that when I saw how little attention they bestowed on me I almost regretted my petticoats. For a moment, indeed, I felt quite mortified, as I happened to forget that I was in men's clothes, and I had to recollect the fact in order not to feel annoyed.

There was I, then, mute as a fish, my arms crossed, and apparently contemplating most attentively the chicken which was assuming a more and more golden-brown tint, and the wretched dog which I had so unseasonably disturbed and which was scrambling around in its wheel like several devils sprinkled with holy water.

The youngest member of the company came up and gave me a slap on the shoulder, which, my faith, hurt a good deal and drew from me an involuntary exclamation. He asked me if I would not rather sup with them than alone, as one drank better in company. I replied that I had not dared to hope for such a pleasure, and that I should be very glad to join them. Our places were laid side by side, and we sat down to table.

The breathless dog, after emptying a huge saucerful of water in three mouthfuls, resumed his place by the

other dog, that had moved no more than a china dog would have done, — the new-comers, by special favour of Heaven, not having asked for roast chicken.

I learned from some remarks that escaped them that they were on their way to the court, which then lay at ——, and that they were to join others of their friends there. I told them that I was a young fellow of good family, fresh from the University, and that I was going to see some provincial relatives of mine, taking the regular schoolboys' road, that is, the longest way round. They laughed at this and, after a few remarks on my innocent and candid looks, asked me if I had a mistress. I replied that I did not know, whereupon they laughed more heartily than before. Bottle after bottle of wine was being rapidly emptied. Although I took care to keep my glass nearly always full, the wine had gone a little bit to my head, and not forgetting my object I so managed as to bring the talk round to the subject of women. Nor was it difficult to do so, for next to theology and æsthetics, it is of women that men best like to speak when they are tipsy.

My fellows were not drunk exactly, — they carried their liquor too well to be that, — but they were beginning to enter upon endless discussions of morals, and to lean

unceremoniously upon the table. One of them had even put his arm round the spacious waist of one of the maids, and lolled his head very amorously. Another swore that he would forthwith burst, after the manner of a toad to which snuff has been given, if Janet did not let him kiss the two big red apples she called her cheeks. Janet, not wishing him to burst like a toad, graciously granted the desired favour, and did not even stay his hand when it boldly insinuated itself between the folds of her neckerchief into the warm vale of her bosom, which was but ill-defended by a little gold cross, and it was only after a brief conversation in a low voice that he allowed her to remove the dish.

And yet these were courtiers and well-bred men, and certainly, had I not seen it for myself, I would never have thought of charging them with taking such liberties with servant wenches. I dare say they had just left charming mistresses, to whom they had sworn the finest oaths in the world; indeed, I for one would never have dreamed of making my lover promise that he would not filthy, by contact with a scullion's cheeks, the lips which I had just pressed to mine.

The rascal seemed to greatly enjoy his kiss, to the full as much as if it had been given to Phyllis or

Oriana. It was a smacking kiss, squarely and plumply planted, and which left on the lass's blazing cheek two little white marks, the trace of which she effaced with the back of the hand that had just been washing dishes. I do not believe that man had ever kissed the chaste goddess of his heart with so much natural tenderness, and apparently that thought occurred to him, for he murmured, with a disdainful turn of the elbow:

"The devil take thin women and fine sentiments!"

Which morality appeared to be to the taste of the company, for every one nodded approvingly.

"Upon my word," went on our friend, still pursuing his thought, "I am a most unlucky beggar. I must confide to you, gentlemen, under the seal of the strictest secrecy, that I who address you am at this moment indulging in a passion."

"Oh! oh!" said the others. "A passion! that is as bad as bad can be. What business have you with a passion?"

"She is an honest woman, gentlemen. Now, do not laugh, for why should I not have an honest woman? Did I say anything absurd? . . . Here, you, look out or I shall chuck the house at you, if you do not stop."

"Well, go on."

"She is madly in love with me — is endowed with the loveliest soul; I am as great a connoisseur in souls as in horses, and I warrant you hers is of the first quality. She indulges in enthusiasm, ecstasy, devotion, sacrifice, refinement of tenderness, all that can be imagined of most transcendental; but she has no breasts to speak of, none at all indeed, any more than a girl of fifteen. Rather pretty for the rest, — small hand and small foot; too clever and not plump enough, and I feel like dropping her, for, devil take me, one does not care to go to bed with a spirit. I am very unhappy; pity me, dear friends."

And, moved to tears by the wine he had drunk, he began to weep copiously.

"Janet will console you for being unfortunate enough to have to sleep with a sylph," said his neighbour, as he poured him out a bumper. Her soul is so dense that it might be made into bodies for others, and she has flesh enough for three elephants."

O pure and noble woman, if you knew how the man you love most on earth, to whom you have sacrificed everything, talks about you in a pot-house, carelessly, to people whom he does not know. How shamelessly

he strips you bare and exhibits you nude to the drunken gaze of his comrades, while you are yonder, leaning on your elbow, watching the road by which he will return!

Suppose some one had come and told you that, some twenty-four hours after leaving you, your lover would be courting a low wench, and arranging to spend the night with her, you would have affirmed that that was impossible, and you would have refused to credit it. You would scarce have believed your own ears and eyes; and yet it was true.

The mad and extravagant talk lasted some time longer, but through the comic exaggeration, the frequently filthy jokes, there showed a deep and genuine feeling of utter contempt for woman, and I learned more in that single evening than by the reading of twenty cartloads of the works of moralists.

The awful, the incredible things I heard brought to my face a look of sadness and severity, which the other guests perceived and on which they politely rallied me, but I could not bring back my gaiety. I had indeed suspected that men were different from what they appeared to be in our society, but I had not believed that they were so wholly unlike the mask they then wore, and my surprise equalled my disgust.

If I wanted to cure forever a romantically inclined maiden, I should ask for no more than half an hour of a talk like the one I was listening to. It would be far more effectual than all a mother's remonstrances.

Some of the company boasted that they had just as many women as they pleased, and had but a word to say to seduce them; others exchanged recipes for the easy conquest of a mistress, or discussed the tactics to be followed when laying siege to a woman's virtue; others made sport of the women whose lovers they were, and proclaimed themselves the greatest fools on earth for having sunk to the level of such trash. All held love very cheap.

So this is what they conceal from us under so much fair seeming. Who would ever guess it, to see them so humble, obedient, ready to do anything? Ah! how proudly they raise their heads after the victory; how insolently they press their boot-heel on the forehead they adored on their knees from afar; how well they compensate for their temporary humiliation; how dearly they make us pay for their politeness, and by how many insults do they refresh themselves after the madrigals they have composed for us! What thorough-paced brutality of thought and speech; what low man-

ners and deportment! The change is total, and not to their advantage, of a surety. Much as I had anticipated, I still fell far short of the reality.

O Idealism, blue flower with the golden heart, that bloomest under the spring skies in the perfumed breath of our soft reveries, whose fibrous roots, infinitely more tenuous than fairies' silken locks, plunge into the very depths of our souls their numberless rootlets to drain the purest of our being; O so sweet and so bitter flower, thou canst not be uprooted without our heart bleeding at every point, without red drops dripping from thy broken stem, which, falling one by one into the lake of our tears, serve to mark the halting hours of our death-watch by the bedside of passing Love.

How thou hadst grown within my soul, accursed flower, — and multiplied thy boughs in number more than nettles in a ruin. The young nightingales came to drink in thy calyx and to sing in thy shade; diamond butterflies, emerald-winged and ruby-eyed, fluttered and circled around thy delicate pistils covered with dust of gold; swarms of yellow bees sucked trustfully thy poisonous honey; the chimeras folded their swan-wings and crossed their lion's paws under their beauteous bosom to rest by thee. The tree of the Hesperides

was not better guarded; sylphs collected the tears of the stars in the urns of the lily, and watered thee every night with their fairy watering-pots. Plant of the Ideal, more poisonous than the manchineel or the upas-tree, how hard it is, spite of thy deceitful flowers and thy poisonous scent, how hard it is to uproot thee from my soul! Neither the cedar of Lebanon, nor the giant baobab, nor the palm-tree a hundred cubits high, could together fill the place thou hast occupied all alone, little blue flower with the golden heart!

Supper at last came to an end and bed was suggested, but the number of would-be sleepers being double that of the beds, it naturally resulted that we would have to sleep either in turns or two together. The matter was simple enough for the rest of the company, but not at all so for me, thanks to certain prominences well enough concealed by the jerkin and tunic, but which the shirt merely would have allowed to be perceived in all their damnable roundness; and I can assure you I was not much inclined to sacrifice my incognito in favour of any of these gentlemen, who at that time seemed to me to be downright plain-spoken monsters, but whom I have since had reason to know were very good fellows, quite up to the average of their kind.

The one whose bed I was to share was pretty well drunk. He threw himself on the mattress, a leg and an arm hanging to the ground, and at once slept, not the sleep of the just, but a sleep so deep that if the angel of the Last Judgment had blown his trump in his ear, he would not have wakened. Such a sleep greatly simplified matters; I took off only my jacket and boots, stepped across the sleeper, and stretched myself on the sheets on the side nearest the wall.

And here I was, abed with a man! A pretty good way to start out! I confess that, spite all my assurance, I was greatly moved and agitated. The situation was so strange, so novel that I could scarcely believe it other than a dream. My companion slept soundly, but, for my part, I did not close mine eyes all night.

He was a young fellow of about four and twenty, with rather handsome features, black eyelashes, and a blond moustache; his long locks waved round his head like the waves of a river-god's overset urn, his pale cheeks flushed at times, his lips were slightly parted and a faint languishing smile lingered upon them.

I raised myself on my elbow and looked at him a long time by the trembling light of a candle the tallow

of which had almost all guttered away, while the wick was full of charred lumps.

We were separated by a pretty large space. He was on the extreme edge of one side of the bed, and I, for greater precaution, equally far on the other side.

What I had been listening to was not calculated to dispose me to tenderness and voluptuousness — I had a horror of men. Nevertheless, I was far more restless and uneasy than I ought to have been, and my body did not share, to the extent it ought to have done, the repugnance felt by my mind. My heart was beating fast, I was hot, and, turn which way I would, I could not rest.

The deepest silence reigned in the inn; only at times the sound of a horse's hoof stamping on the stable pavement was heard, or the drip of water dropping down the chimney flue on the ashes. The candle, having consumed its wick, went out in smoke.

Cimmerian darkness fell between us as it had been a curtain. You cannot imagine the effect produced upon me by the sudden disappearance of the light. It seemed to me the end had come, and that never again was I to see with my eyes. For a moment I thought of rising, but what could I have done?

It was only two in the morning, every light was out, and I could not wander like a ghost through an unknown house. So I was compelled to stay where I was and to await the day.

There I lay, then, on my back, both hands crossed, trying to think of something and always coming back to this, that I was in bed with a man. I even went the length of wishing he would wake and find out I was a woman. No doubt the wine I had drunk, though sparingly, had something to do with this extraordinary notion, but I kept on coming back to it. I was within an ace of stretching out my hand, waking him, and telling him who I was. It was a fold of the blanket that stopped my arm which prevented my carrying out my intention; it gave me time to think, and while I was freeing my arm the common-sense I had totally lost came back to me, if not wholly, at least sufficiently to enable me to master myself.

Would it not have been funny if a fair Lady Disdain like me, who wanted to know ten years of a man's life before giving him my hand to kiss, should have given herself, in an inn, on a camp-bed, to the first comer? Yet, i' faith, I was very near to doing it.

Is it possible that a sudden flush, a rush of blood can neutralise to such an extent the finest resolves, and does the voice of the flesh speak louder than the voice of the spirit? Every time my pride uplifts itself too much, I bring it down by recalling the remembrance of that night. I begin to share men's opinion — a woman's virtue is a very fragile thing, dependent on what, good heavens!

In vain do we seek to spread our wings, too much mud weighs them down; the body is an anchor that holds the soul to earth; in vain it spreads its sails to the breeze of its loftiest ideas, the ship remains motionless, as if every remora in the ocean clung to its keel. Nature enjoys being thus sarcastic with us. When it sees a thought, upright on its pride as on a high column, almost touch the heavens with its head, it whispers an order to the red fluid to hasten on, to press to the valves of the arteries; it commands the temples to beat, the ears to hum, and the whole idea is seized with vertigo; images mingle and vanish; the ground heaves like a ship's deck in a storm, the heavens spin around, and the stars perform a saraband; the lips, which uttered only austere maxims, pout as if for a kiss; the arms, so resolute to repulse, soften and

become more supple and more clinging than a scarf. Add to this the contact of an epidermis, the blowing of a breath through your hair, and all is lost. Often, indeed, it does not take so much — the scent of foliage coming from the fields into your open window, the sight of two birds billing and cooing, a daisy opening its petals, an old love-song that comes back to you in spite of yourself, and that you repeat without knowing what it means, a soft wind that agitates and intoxicates you, the softness of your bed or your couch — any one of these things suffices. The very solitude of your room makes you reflect that it would be pleasant to be two in it and that no sweeter nest could be found for a covey of pleasures. The drawn curtains, the half-light, the silence, all bring you back to the fatal thought that lightly touches you with its perfidious dove-like wings, and coos gently around you. The very tissues which touch you seem to caress you, and their folds cling amorously to your body. Then the young girl opens her arms to the first lackey with whom she happens to be alone; the philosopher leaves his page unfinished, and, with head hidden in his cloak, hastens to the nearest courtesan.

I certainly did not love the man who caused me to

be so strangely moved. His sole charm consisted in his not being a woman, which was quite enough in my then condition. A man! — that mysterious thing so carefully concealed from us; that strange animal of whom we know so little; that demon or god who alone can realise all the dreams of vague voluptuousness which the springtime gives us in our sleep, — the one thing we think about as soon as we are fifteen!

A man! The vague notion of pleasure floated in my heavy brain; the little I knew of it but excited my desire. An ardent curiosity urged me to clear up once for all the doubts that troubled me and that constantly recurred to me. The solution of the problem was on the next page; I had but to turn it — the book lay next me. A fairly handsome gallant, a rather narrow bed, a mirk night, a girl with a few glasses of champagne in her head — a most suspicious combination truly. Well, the outcome of it all was the most respectable nothingness.

On the wall on which I kept my eyes fixed I began, thanks to the decreasing darkness, to distinguish the place of the window; the panes became less opaque, and the grey light of morn stealing behind them made them transparent again; the sky gradually lighted up —

it was day. You cannot imagine the pleasure caused me by that faint ray falling upon the green Aumale serge hangings that surrounded the glorious field of battle upon which my virtue had triumphed over my desires. It seemed to me it was a crown of victory.

As for my companion, he had rolled to the ground.

I rose, dressed myself as quickly as I could, hastened to the window and opened it. The morning breeze did me good. I stood before the mirror to dress my hair, and I was surprised at the pallor of my face — I had fancied it must be purple.

The others came in to see if we were still asleep, and kicked their friend, who did not seem much surprised to find himself where he was.

The horses were saddled and we set out again. But enough for to-day; my pen refuses to write and I do not feel like mending it; I shall relate to you the rest of my adventures another time. Meanwhile love me as I love you, Graciosa the well-named, and do not have too bad an opinion of my virtue after all I have been telling you.

XI

MANY things are a bore. It is a bore to repay borrowed money which one has got into the way of looking upon as one's own; it is a bore to caress to-day the woman whom one loved yesterday; it is a bore to call at a house at dinner time and to find that the people have been in the country for a month; writing a novel is a bore, and it is a greater bore to read it; a bore to have a grog-blossom and chapped lips on the day one goes to visit the idol of one's soul; to wear facetious boots that grin to the pavement at every seam, and an especial bore to conceal nothingness behind the cobwebs of one's fob; a bore to be a janitor, a bore to be an emperor; a bore to be one's self, and a bore to be some one else, even; a bore to go afoot, because it hurts one's corns, and on horseback because it makes you sore, in a carriage because a stout man invariably uses your shoulder for a pillow, on a steamer because you are seasick and you throw up the whole of yourself; it is a bore to have winter, because one shivers, and summer because one perspires; but the greatest

bore on earth, in hell, or heaven, is unquestionably a tragedy, or else a drama, or a comedy.

That really sickens me. Is there anything more foolish, more stupid? Are not those bull-voiced, stout tyrants who stride across the stage from wing to wing, swinging their hairy arms, clad in flesh-coloured tights like the sails of a windmill, but poor imitations of Blue Beard and the Ogre? Their rhodomontades would make any one who could keep awake burst into laughter.

Nor are unfortunate females in love less ridiculous. It is diverting to see them come forward, dressed in white or black, with hair weepingly outspread on their shoulders, sleeves weepingly outspread on their hands, and their body ready to spring out of their corset like a fruit-stone pressed between the fingers, appearing to drag the flooring along with the soles of their satin shoes and, at times of great emotion, throwing their train behind them with a kick of the foot. The dialogue, composed exclusively of "Oh!" and "Ah!" which they cluck out as they show off, is a truly pleasant food, of easy digestion. The princes, too, are very charming; they are a little too sombre and melancholy, but none the less the liveliest fellows in this world — and elsewhere.

As for comedy, which is to mend manners, and which, fortunately, performs that task very ill, I think the sermons of fathers and the prosiness of uncles are just as deadly wearisome on the stage as in real life. I do not believe in doubling the number of fools by putting them on the boards; there are enough of them already, God knows, and the breed shows no sign of becoming extinct. What is the use of drawing the portrait of a man with a snout like a hog's or a mouth like a bull's, or of collecting the foolish sayings of a churl you would throw out of the window if he came to see you. The portrait of a churl is as little interesting as the churl himself, and he is none the less a churl when seen in a mirror. The actor who should succeed in imitating perfectly the attitude and manners of cobblers would not delight me much more than a real cobbler.

But there is a theatre I do love — the fantastic, extravagant, impossible theatre, in which the worthy public pitilessly hisses from the very first scene, because it cannot understand a word.

It is a curious theatre: glow-worms take the place of the footlights; a scarabæus, marking time with its antennæ, stands at the conductor's desk. The cricket sings his part; the nightingale is first flautist; little

sylphs, issuing from the blossoms of sweet peas, hold bass-viols of lemon-skin between their pretty legs, whiter than ivory, and scrape vigorously with bows made of one of Titania's eyelashes strings made of cobweb-threads. The little full-bottomed wig that the leader of the orchestra wears trembles with pleasure and casts around a luminous powder, so sweet is the harmony and so well-performed the overture.

A curtain made of butterflies' wings and thinner than the inner pellicle of an egg, rises slowly after the regulation three knocks. The auditorium is full of poets' souls seated in mother-of-pearl stalls, and watching the play through drops of dew mounted on lily pistils. These are their opera-glasses.

The scenery is unlike any known scenery; the country it represents is yet more unknown than was America before it was discovered. The richest painter's palette has not half the tints which shimmer on it; it is all painted in the strangest and quaintest colours; ash-green, ash-blue, ultramarine, red and yellow lake abound.

The sky, of a greenish blue, is traversed by broad strips of golden and dun colour; little trees, thin and slight, show in the middle distance their sparse foliage

tinted like faded roses; the distance, instead of melting into an azure mist, is of the liveliest apple-green, with spirals of golden smoke rising here and there. A stray sunbeam lights upon the pediment of a ruined temple or upon the spire of a tower. Cities full of finials, pyramids, domes, arcades, and slopes are seated on hills and reflected in crystal lakes; great trees, whose broad leaves have been boldly cut out by fairies' scissors, mingle their trunks and branches inextricably to form the wings. The clouds of heaven are heaped up on their tops like flakes of snow, and between the branches flash the eyes of gnomes and dwarfs, while the twisted roots plunge into the soil like some giant's hand. The green-finch strikes them rhythmically with its horny bill, and emerald lizards warm themselves in the sun on the moss at their feet.

The mushroom watches the play with its hat on its head, like the insolent fellow it is; the sweet violet rises on tiptoe between two blades of grass, and opens wide its blue eyes to watch the hero pass.

At the end of the boughs the bull-finch and linnet hang to prompt the actors.

Through the high grass, the tall purple thistles and the velvet-leaved meander, like silver snakes, brooks

made of the tears of stags at bay; here and there gleam amid the turf anemones like blood-drops, and daisies which proudly swell out their heads crowned with pearls, like any real duchess.

The characters are of no particular time or country. They come and go without your knowing why or wherefore; they neither eat nor drink; they have neither home nor profession; they have no lands, no income, no houses; sometimes they do carry under their arm a little box full of diamonds as big as pigeons' eggs. When they walk, they do not shake a single drop of dew from the tips of flowers, and raise not a grain of the dust on the roads.

They wear the most extravagant and fantastic of garments, — steeple-crowned hats with brims as wide as a Chinese parasol, and absurdly long feathers plucked from the tail of the phœnix and the bird of paradise; capes striped in loud colours; doublets of velvet and brocade, showing the satin or silver-cloth lining in the gold-trimmed slashings; trunk-hose puffed out and rounded like balloons; scarlet stockings with embroidered clocks; high-heeled shoes with big rosettes; little small swords point up, hilt down, with innumerable buckles and ribbons. So much for the men.

The women are no less curiously dressed. An idea of their attire may be gained from the drawings of Della Bella and Romeyn de Hooge. They wear full, rich dresses with great folds that shimmer like doves' throats and reflect every colour of the iris; great sleeves, with undersleeves issuing from them, lace ruffs of openwork rising higher than the head they thus frame in; bodices covered with knots and broidery, aiguillettes, quaint jewels, aigrettes of heron's plumes, necklaces of large pearls, fans of peacock's-feathers with mirrors in the centre, slippers and high-heeled shoes, wreaths of artificial flowers, spangles, gauzes shot with silver or gold powder, patches, — whatever, in a word, can render a stage costume more attractive and piquant.

It is not exactly in the English, the German, the French, the Turkish, the Spanish, or the Tartar taste, though a little of each, and though it has borrowed from each country whatever it has of most graceful and characteristic.

Actors thus costumed may say what they please without doing violence to probability. Fancy may roam at will, style display as it pleases its diapered rings, like a snake that warms itself in the sun; the most far-fetched concetti may ope their quaint blooms

and shed around them their mingled scent of amber and musk. There is nothing to say them nay, whether places, names, or costume.

How charming and amusing is what they tell! It is not such perfect actors as they who would, like shouters of lines, twist their mouths and stick out the eyes in order to bring out strongly their great speech; they do not look like workmen labouring at their task, like oxen harnessed to the action and eager to be done; they are not plastered with chalk and rouge half an inch thick; they do not wear tin daggers, and they have not in reserve under their doublet a pig's bladder full of chickens' blood; they do not wear the same oil-stained rags act after act.

They speak without hurrying their delivery, without shouting, like well-bred people who do not attach much importance to what they do. The lover makes his proposal to the lady in the most detached fashion; slapping his leg, as he talks, with the tip of his white glove, or adjusting his knee-lace. The lady nonchalantly shakes the dewdrops from her nosegay and exchanges witticisms with her maid. The lover cares very little whether he moves the heart of his cruel fair; the main point with him is to let fall from his lips

clusters of pearls, bunches of roses, and to scatter them like a true prodigal poetic genius; often, indeed, he stands aside altogether and lets the author court his mistress for him. Jealousy is not one of his faults, and he is of the most accommodating temper. His eyes fixed upon the flies of the stage, he calmly waits until the poet has said what his fancy suggested, to resume his part and kneel down again.

Complications are made and unmade with the most delightful carelessness; causes produce no effects; effects do not follow causes; the wittiest character is the stupidest; the dullest says the cleverest things; maidens talk in a way to make courtesans blush, and courtesans utter moral maxims. The most incredible adventures succeed each other without explanation; the heavy father arrives purposely from China in a bamboo junk to recognise a little girl who had been carried off; gods and fairies keep going up and down in their machines. The action plunges into the sea under the topaz dome of the waves, and meanders at the bottom of the ocean, through forests of corals and madreporæ, or else it soars heavenwards on the wings of lark and griffon. The dialogue is most catholic; the lion contributes a well roared "Oh!" the wall

speaks with its crevices, and any one may interrupt the most interesting scene provided he has a quip, a riddle, or a pun to interject. Bottom's ass's head is as welcome as the golden locks of Ariel. The author's mind exhibits itself under every form, and all these contradictions are so many polished facets, which not only reflect the various aspects but add to them the colours of the prism.

This apparent hurly-burly and disorder turn out, after all, to reproduce real life with its fantastic ways more accurately than the most carefully studied out drama of manners. Every man is in himself all humanity, and if he writes what occurs to him he succeeds better than if he copies, with the help of a magnifying glass, objects placed outside of him.

What a lovely family it is: romantic young lovers, wandering damsels, helpful maids, caustic buffoons, valets and artless peasants, debonair kings whose names are unknown to the historian and their realms to the geographer, striped *graciosos*, clowns amazing in repartee and miraculous in somersaults, — you who allow free caprice to speak with your smiling lips, I love and adore you above all others, — Perdita, Rosalind, Celia, Pandarus, Parolles, Silvio, Leander, and the others, all

the charming characters, so unreal and so true, that rise above coarse reality on folly's diapered wings, and who incarnate the poet's joy, melancholy, love, and most secret dreams, under the airiest and most frivolous appearance.

In this drama, written for fairies, and which has to be performed by moonlight, there is one play which especially delights me, — a play so erratic, so vagabond, with so dreamy a plot and such strange characters, that the author himself, not knowing what to call it, has given it the elastic title "As You Like It," which may mean anything.

When you read that strange play, you are carried off into an unknown world, which, however, you have faint memories of. You know not whether you are dead or alive, asleep or awake. Gracious faces smile sweetly upon you and bid you a friendly good-day as they pass; you are moved and troubled at sight of them as if you had suddenly met your ideal at a turn in the road or the ghost of your first love rose suddenly before you. Purling brooks murmur half-stifled plaints; the wind rustles through the ancient trees of the forest of eld with sympathetic wail above the old duke's head, and when melancholy Jacques drops into the current his

philosophical complaints with the willow leaves, you fancy 't is yourself are speaking, and that the most secret and carefully hidden thought in your heart is revealed and illumined.

O young son of the brave knight Roland du Bois so ill-used by fate, I cannot help being jealous of you, — you still have a faithful servant, good Adam, whose green old age shows under his snowy hair. You are banished, but first you fought and won; your wicked brother takes all your possessions from you, but Rosalind gives you the chain from round her neck; you are poor, but loved; you have to leave your native land, but your persecutor's daughter follows you over seas.

The dark Ardennes open their great arms of foliage to receive and hide you; the kindly forest heaps up for your bed its softest mosses in its grottoes; it bends over your head its arching boughs to protect you against rain and sun; it weeps for you with the tears of its springs, the sighs of its fawns, and the bellow of its stags; it turns its rocks into complacent desks for your love epistles, lends you the thorns of its bushes to hang them on, and commands the satin bark of the quivering aspen to yield to your point when you desire to grave Rosalind's cipher.

If we could, like you, handsome Orlando, have a great, shady forest wherein to retire and be alone with our sorrow, and if we could only meet, at the corner of a walk, her we seek, easily known though disguised! But alas! the spiritual world has no verdant Ardennes, and it is only in Poesy's garden that bloom the little wild, fanciful flowers with the memory-destroying scent. In vain do we shed tears, they fall in no silver cascades; in vain we sigh, no kindly echo takes pains to repeat our plaints, adorning them with assonance and seasoning them with wit. In vain we hang sonnets on every thorn,—Rosalind never picks them up; and it is in vain that we cut love-ciphers in the bark of trees.

Ye birds of heaven, lend me each a feather, swallow and eagle, humming-bird and roc, that I may make wings and fly high and fast through unknown regions, where I shall meet nothing to recall the city of the living, where I may forget myself, and lead a new, strange life,—farther than America, farther than Africa, farther than Asia, than the uttermost isles of the sea, through the Frozen Ocean, beyond the pole where gleams the aurora borealis, into the impalpable realm whither flee the divine creations of the poets and the types of supreme beauty.

How is it possible to bear with the ordinary conversation in drawing-rooms once one has heard thee speak, brilliant Mercutio, whose every sentence is a golden or silvern shower, like unto fireworks bursting in a starry sky? Pallid Desdemona, how can we enjoy any earthly music after we have heard "Willow"? What woman but seems ugly by the side of your Venuses, ye sculptors of antiquity, ye poets who sing in marble?

Ah! spite of the mad embrace in which I sought to clasp the material world when the other escaped me, I feel that I am born out of due season, that life is not made for me and repels me. There is naught in which I can share; whatever the path I follow I lose my way; the smooth road and the rocky track alike lead to an abyss. If I seek to take my flight, the air grows heavy about me and I remain with extended wings I am helpless to close. I can neither walk nor fly; when I am on earth heaven attracts me; when in heaven, earth draws me back; above, the storm displumes my wings; below, the stones wound my feet, the soles of which are too tender to allow me to walk on the broken glass of reality, while my wings are not broad enough to enable me to soar above earthly things,

and to rise, from sphere to sphere, into the deep azure of mysticism, to the inaccessible summits of eternal love. I am the most wretched hippogriph, the most pitiable make-up of heterogeneous materials that ever saw the light since the time that Ocean took to loving the moon and women to deceiving men. In comparison with me, Chimæra, the monster slain by Bellerophon, with her maiden's head, her lion's paws, her goat's body, and her dragon tail, was a being of simple make-up.

Within my frail breast dwell together the violet-strewn dreams of the chaste maiden and the mad ardours of courtesans in an orgy; my desires go about like lions, sharpening their claws and seeking what they may devour; my thoughts, more feverish, more restless than goats, hang upon the most threatening crests; my hatred, swollen with poison, twists its scaly folds into inextricable knots and slowly drags along in ruts and ravines.

A strange land indeed is my soul, in appearance a land flourishing and rich, but more penetrated by putrid and deleterious miasmata than Batavia itself. The least sunbeam that lights upon the slime brings forth reptiles and the innumerable mosquito. The

great yellow tulips, the nagassaries and the blooms of the angsoka gorgeously conceal foul rottenness. The amorous rose opes its scarlet lips and smiles as it exhibits its dewdrop teeth to the gallant nightingales that recite madrigals and sonnets to her, but it is safe to wager that, charming as the scene is, below, in the grass, at the foot of the bush, a dropsical toad crawls on crippled legs and silvers its path with slime.

Here are springs clearer and more limpid than the purest diamond, yet were it better to drink of the stagnant marsh water, with its mantle of rotten reeds and drowned dogs, than to fill your cup from their wave. At the bottom is concealed a serpent that whirls round with dreadful speed and forever distils its venom.

You have sown wheat, and instead spring up asphodel, tares, and pallid hemlock with verdigrised shoots. Instead of the root you planted, you are surprised to see come up the hairy and gnarled limbs of the black mandragora.

Leave a remembrance there and return for it some time later, you will find it more moss-green and overrun with roaches and disgusting insects than a stone placed upon the damp soil of a cellar.

Do not attempt to traverse its dark forests; they are more impassable than the virgin forests of America and the jungles of Java; creepers as big as cables pass from tree to tree; plants, sharp and bristling like lance-heads, bar every issue; the sward itself is covered with a down that stings like the nettle. The vampire bat hangs from the arches of the trees; enormous beetles wave threatening horns and beat the air with their quadruple wings; monstrous, fantastic animals, like those of our nightmares, crash heavily forward through the reeds. Herds of elephants that nip to death flies between the folds of their dry skin or rub their sides against the stones and trees, rhinoceroses with thick hide, hippopotami with huge hairy snout, trampling the wood and detritus of the forest with their huge feet.

In the glades, where the sun darts a luminous beam like a golden wedge through the warm moisture, on the spot where you would like to sit down, you always find a tiger's family lazily lolling, inhaling the air, slowly winking their sea-green eyes, and licking their velvet fur with their blood-red, papillæ-covered tongue, or a knot of pythons half asleep digesting the bull they last swallowed.

Beware of everything — grass, fruit, air, water, sun, and shade; everything is deadly. Close your ears to the chatter of the little golden-billed, emerald-necked parrots that alight from the trees on your fingers and flutter their wings, for the pretty little parrots with the emerald necks and the golden bills will end by prettily picking out your eyes at the very moment you are bending to kiss them. That is the way of it!

The world will have none of me; it repulses me as though I were a spectre escaped from the tomb, and I am almost as pallid as if I were. My blood will not believe that I am alive, and refuses to colour my skin; it flows slowly in my veins like still water in a choked drain. Naught of what makes men's hearts beat quickens mine. My woes and my joys are not the joys and woes of my fellows. I have violently desired what is desired by no one, and disdained what others madly desire. I have loved women who did not love me, and been loved when I would I had been hated, — always too soon or too late, too far or not far enough, hither or thither, but never just what ought to have been; either I did not get to the point or I went beyond it. I have thrown away my life or

else I have concentrated it to excess on a single point, and from the busybody's useless activity I have got to the dull somnolence of the opium-eater or of the Stylite on his pillar.

Whatever I do always has the appearance of a dream; my acts seem rather the result of somnambulism than that of free will; there is something in me which I vaguely feel deep down, which makes me act without my concurring in the act, and always outside of ordinary laws. I never see the plain and natural side of things until after all the others; I light first on the eccentric and unusual. If the line happens to be in the least askew I turn it into a spiral more twisted than a serpent; if the outlines are not drawn with the utmost clearness, they soon grow vaguer and become deformed. Faces assume a supernatural appearance and gaze upon me with terrifying eyes.

So by a sort of instinctive reaction I have always clung desperately to matter, to the external form of things, and have given a very important place to plasticity in art. I thoroughly understand a statue, and do not understand a man; where life begins I stop and draw back in terror, as if I had beheld the

Medusa. The phenomenon of life causes an amazement in me that I cannot overcome. I have no doubt I should make an excellent corpse, for I am a very poor living being and the feeling of my existence escapes me completely. The sound of my voice surprises me to an unimaginable degree, and I am sometimes tempted to think it is some one else's voice. If I wish to stretch out my arm, and my arm obeys me, the fact strikes me as prodigious and fills me with the greatest amazement.

On the other hand, Silvio, I thoroughly understand the unintelligible; the most extravagant propositions appear most natural to me, and I grasp them with remarkable facility. I can easily supply the conclusion of the most fantastic and the wildest of nightmares. This is why the kind of play of which I was telling you just now pleases me above all others.

Theodore, Rosette, and I have long discussions on this subject. Rosette does not much care for my system, she is a partisan of real truth; Theodore gives the poet more latitude and admits a conventional and optical truth. For my part, I maintain that the author must be wholly free, and that fancy must be supreme.

Many of the guests took their stand chiefly on the fact that such plays are usually outside dramatic conditions and could not be performed; to which I replied that they were partly right and partly wrong, like pretty much everything that is said, and that the views held on the possibilities and impossibilities of the stage seemed to me to lack soundness, and to spring from prejudices rather than reasons. I stated, among other things, that the play of "As You Like It" could readily be performed, especially by society people who were not in the habit of playing other parts.

This suggested the idea of performing the play. The season is drawing on and all the modes of amusement have been exhausted; every one is tired of hunting-parties, riding-parties, water-parties; the chances at boston, varied as they are, lack enough piquancy to fill up an evening, and the proposal to give a play was received with universal enthusiasm.

A young fellow who can paint offered to take charge of the scenery; he is even now hard at work upon it and it will be ready in a few days. The stage is erected in the orangery, the largest room in the mansion, and I think all will go well. I play Orlando. Rosette was to be Rosalind, naturally; being my

mistress and the mistress of the house, the part was hers by right, but she refused to dress in men's clothes, — rather a singular caprice for her to indulge in, for prudery is assuredly not one of her faults. Had I not been sure of the contrary I should have supposed she had ill-shapen limbs. Now, none of the ladies in the company would allow herself to be less scrupulous than Rosette, and the piece was nearly given up in consequence, but Theodore, who had taken the part of the melancholy Jacques, offered to take Rosette's place, as Rosalind is almost always in male attire except in the first act, where she dresses as a woman, and with powder, rouge, a pair of stays, and a gown he could readily enough pass muster, the more so that he is still beardless and has a very waspish waist.

We are busy learning our parts, and it is amusing to watch us. You may rely on coming upon, in the most solitary recesses of the park, some one of us, book in hand, muttering sentences, looking up to heaven, gazing suddenly at the ground, and repeating the same gesture seven or eight times. If it were not known that we are getting up a play, we would certainly be taken for a houseful of maniacs or poets (which is a pleonasm).

I think we shall soon know our lines well enough to have a rehearsal. I expect the performance will be peculiar, but I may be wrong. I feared for a moment lest our people, instead of playing as they felt inspired, would try to reproduce the attitudes and the vocal inflections of some popular actor; but they have happily not frequented the theatre sufficiently to fall into such a mistake, and I incline to believe that, maugre the awkwardness of people who have never trod the boards, they will exhibit flashes of naturalness and charming artlessness such as the most consummate talent could not reproduce.

Our young painter has done wonders: it would be impossible to give a stranger air to the old tree-trunks and the ivies which cling to them. He took for models those in the park, but strengthened and exaggerated them in parts, as should be done in stage scenery. He has done all his work with admirable vigour and fancy; the stones, the rocks, the clouds have mysterious, grimacing shapes; shimmering reflections play upon waters more quivering and mobile than quicksilver itself, and the usual coldness of the foliage is superbly relieved by the saffron tints which autumn has brushed upon it; the colour of the forest

ranges from emerald-green to cornelian-purple; the warmest and coolest tones contrast harmoniously, and the sky itself melts from the most glowing tints into the tenderest blue.

He has drawn all the costumes with my assistance; they are uncommonly characteristic. At first it was urged they could never be made out of silks and velvets or any known stuffs, and for a brief moment I had reason to fear that troubadour dresses would carry the day. The ladies objected that the brilliant colours would dim their glances; whereto I replied that their eyes were stars that could not be extinguished, and that, on the contrary, their glances would cause the colours to pale and eclipse the foot-lights, the chandelier, and even the sun, if it chanced along. They had nothing to say to that, but other objections arose in bristling masses like the Lernæan hydra; no sooner had I cut down one than another arose more stupid still and more obstinate.

"How do you expect that to keep on?"—"It is all right on paper, but quite another thing on one's back. I shall never get inside that!"—"My skirt is at least four inches too short; I shall never dare to show myself in such fashion!"—"The ruff is too high; I

look as if I were a humpback and had no neck." — "That way of dressing my hair makes me look as old as the hills." — "Starch, pins, and willingness will make anything hang together." — "Nonsense, with a waist like yours, that would shame a wasp and would be at ease in my finger-ring! I'll wager twenty-five louis to a kiss that your bodice will have to be taken in." — "Your skirt is far from being too short, and if you could only see how lovely your limbs are, you would certainly be of my opinion." — "On the contrary, your neck shows admirably in its aureole of lace." — "That way of dressing your hair does not age you at all; but even if you did seem a few years older, you are so exceedingly young that you really cannot care a straw about it; the fact is that if we did not know where the pieces of your last doll are, we should entertain the strangest suspicions" — and so on, and so on.

You can have no idea of the prodigious number of madrigals we have had to expend before we could induce the ladies to put on lovely costumes which became them exceedingly.

We had endless trouble also in making them put on their patches properly. Women have pretty bad taste,

and there is nothing worse than the obstinacy of a flighty coquette who is convinced that straw glacé suits her better than jonquil or bright rose. I feel certain that had I applied to public affairs one half the skill I have spent on ruses and intrigues to have a red feather put on the right instead of the left, I should now be a minister of state or an emperor, at the very least.

What a pandemonium must a professional theatre be! — what a frightful and unmanageable crowd!

Since the idea of a play was started, everything here is in the most thorough confusion. Every drawer is wide open, every wardrobe emptied, — it looks as if the place had been sacked. Tables, arm-chairs, side-tables, everything is lumbered up; there is no room for the sole of one's feet. Scattered all over the house are prodigious numbers of gowns, mantles, veils, skirts, capes, toques, hats, and when you reflect that all this is to be worn by seven or eight persons you cannot help thinking of those artists at country fairs who wear eight or ten suits one over another, and it is hard to believe that but one costume apiece will come out of the heap.

The servants are going and coming all the time; there are two or three of them constantly travelling be-

tween the mansion and the town, and if this is kept up every horse in the stables will be broken-winded.

A theatrical manager has no time to be melancholy, and I have not been for some time past. I am so deafened and bothered that I am beginning not to know what the play is about. As I am manager, in addition to playing Orlando, I have to do double duty. Whenever a difficulty occurs recourse is had to me, and as my decisions are not always accepted as are those of an oracle, the result is endless discussion.

If living consists in being always on one's feet, replying to a score of people, going up and down stairs, not having a minute in which to think during the whole day, then I have never lived so much as this week; and yet I am not so much excited as might be thought. The agitation is not very deep, and a few fathoms below the surface there is again dead, motionless water; life does not penetrate into me quite so easily; indeed the very time when I am least alive is when I appear to be very energetic and to be taking part in what is going on. Action stupefies and wearies me to a degree you cannot conceive; when I am not acting, I think, or at least I dream, and that is one way of living; I lose it as soon as I emerge from my porcelain idol's rest.

Up to this I have done nothing, and I do not know that I shall ever do anything. I cannot stop my brain, which makes the difference between a man of talent and a man of genius; it is an endless bubbling up, one wave drives on another. I cannot master that sort of internal rush from the heart to the head which drowns all my thoughts for want of issues. I am unable to produce anything, — not through sterility, but through superabundance; my ideas shoot up so thick and close that they stifle one another and cannot ripen. No execution, however swift and lightning-like, can attain such a speed; when I write a sentence the thought it is to express is already as far from me as if a century and not a second only had lapsed, and often I mix with it, spite of myself, something of the thought which has replaced it in my brain.

That is why I cannot live, either as poet or lover. I can express those ideas only which have already escaped me; I possess women only when I have forgotten them and taken to loving others. Man as I am, how could I make my will manifest, since, hasten as I may, I no longer feel what I am doing and act merely upon a vague reminiscence?

I shall never be able to take a thought from its

matrix in the brain, to bring it out first in the rough, like a block of marble taken from the quarry, to place it before me, and from morning till night, chisel in one hand, mallet in the other, chip, cut, scrape, and carry off at night a pinch of dust to throw on my writing.

I can clearly separate in my mind the lissome figure from the rough block; I see it very plainly; but there are so many angles to cut away, so many chips to knock off, so many strokes of smoother and mallet to strike, in order to get at all near the form and to secure the true curve of the contour, that my hands blister and I let fall the chisel.

Should I persist, the fatigue becomes so intense that my sight is quite darkened, and the marble cloud prevents my beholding the white goddess concealed within its depths. Then I grope after it at haphazard: I cut too deep in one place and not deep enough in another; I break off what was to have been a leg or an arm, and leave a solid lump where a hollow should be. Instead of a goddess I turn out a shapeless figure, even less than that sometimes; and the superb block, extracted at such great cost and with so much labour from the bowels of the earth, hammered, carved, worked out in every part,

seems rather to have been bored by worms to make a hive, than fashioned by a sculptor in accordance with a definite plan.

How did you manage, Michael Angelo, to slice off the marble as a child cuts a chestnut? Of what steel were your unconquered chisels? And from what robust loins have you sprung, all of you fruitful, hard-working artists, whom no material can resist and who realise your whole dream in colour or in bronze?

It is, in a way, an innocent and permissible bit of vanity, after what I have just said about myself, and you, Silvio, will not be the one to blame me for it; but, though the world will never know it and though my name is foredoomed to forgetfulness, I too am a poet and a painter. I have conceived thoughts as beauteous as those of any poet that ever lived; I have created as pure, as divine types as the most admired of those of the old masters. I see them before me as clear and distinct as if they were actually painted, and could I but cut and glaze a hole in my head for people to look into it, it would be the most marvellous picture-gallery ever known. No earthly sovereign can boast of possessing one like it. I have in it some Rubens as resplendent in colour, as vivid, as the very best at Ant-

werp; my Raphaels are in the highest state of preservation, and his Madonnas smile not more graciously; Buonarotti has not drawn muscular action more vigorously and superbly than in my work; the Venetian sun shines on this canvas just as though it were signed Paulus Cagliari; the deep shadows of Rembrandt himself are crowded into that picture in which quivers in the distance a faint spot of light; the paintings in my own particular manner would assuredly be disdained by no one.

I know very well that it is a strange thing for me to talk thus, and that it makes me appear stupidly intoxicated with the most absurd pride, but the fact is as I have stated it, and nothing can change my belief in it. No one will share it; I cannot help that. Every one of us is born sealed with a black or a white seal. Mine appears to be black.

Occasionally, even, I find it difficult to conceal this belief of mine sufficiently. It has often happened to me to speak in too familiar fashion of those great geniuses whose footsteps we ought to adore and whose statues should be gazed at from afar and on bended knee. Once I did so far forget myself as to say, "We." Fortunately it was to one who did not

notice it, else I should have been taken for the most conceited ass that ever lived.

Surely, Silvio, I am both poet and painter. It is a mistake to believe that all those who had the reputation of being geniuses were really greater men than others. No one knows how much Raphael's reputation owes to the pupils and obscure painters whom he employed on his works; he appended his signature to the intellect and talent of many — that is all.

A great painter, a great writer occupy the attention of, and fill a whole century, and the first thing they do is to try all the different *genres* at once, so that should any rivals arise they can forthwith accuse them of plagiarism, and thus stop them at the outset of their career. It is a very well-known trick, which, old as it is, proves successful every day.

It may happen that an already famous man has exactly the same kind of talent that you have; under pain of passing for his imitator you are obliged to thwart your natural inspiration, and to turn it into another channel. You were born to blow a blast upon the heroic trump, or to call up the pallid phantoms of bygone ages, — you have to caress the seven-note flute, or make knots on a sofa at the back of some

boudoir; and this because you were not born eight or ten years earlier, and the world cannot understand that two men should cultivate the same field at the same time.

Thus it is that many a noble mind is forced to follow a road which it knows to be the wrong one, and to continually skirt its own proper domain from which it is banished, counting itself lucky if it can occasionally cast a furtive glance over the hedge, and see, blooming on the other side, the beautiful richly coloured flowers of which it possesses the seed, but which it cannot sow for want of ground.

As far as I am concerned, bar the greater or less fortunate concourse of circumstances, the greater or less amount of air and sunshine, the fact of a door being shut which should have been open, a meeting missed, some one unknown whom I ought to have known, I am not sure that I should ever have succeeded, for I do not possess the requisite amount of stupidity to become what is called a *genius*, absolutely, nor the amazing obstinacy which is then apotheosised under the fine appellation of "will," once the great man has reached the mountain's crest, and without which, indeed, he cannot reach the summit. I am too well

aware of the hollowness of all things, of their being but rottenness, to allow myself to be long attached to any one, and to pursue it ardently and solely through all obstacles.

Men of genius are very narrow; that is how they come to be men of genius. Their lack of intelligence prevents their perceiving the obstacles which intervene between them and the object they are resolved to reach; they push on, and in two or three strides they have traversed the intervening space. Their minds being completely closed to certain influences, and taking account only of those matters which immediately pertain to their projects, they expend greatly less thought and action. Nothing disturbs, nothing turns them; they act instinctively rather than from motives, and several, if withdrawn from their special sphere, are null to a degree difficult to comprehend.

Undoubtedly the gift of writing in verse is a rare and delightful one, and few people enjoy poetry and all that belongs to it more than I do. Yet I decline to bound and circumscribe my life within the twelve feet of an alexandrine; many a thing interests me fully as much as a hemistich, — not the state of society and needed reforms, to be sure, for little care I whether the

peasantry can read and write, or whether mankind eats bread or browses grass, — but there come to me, in a single hour, innumerable visions which have no relation whatever to cæsura or rime; and that is why I produce so little, though I am fuller of ideas than many a poet who might well be burned alive along with his works.

I adore beauty and feel it in my inmost being; I can describe it as well as can the sculptors most in love with it; yet I turn out no sculpture. The ugliness and imperfection of the first model are repulsive to me; I have not the patience to wait until the work becomes perfect by dint of polishing and repolishing it. If I could make up my mind to leave some things in what I do, be it verse, be it painting, I might perchance succeed in producing a poem or a picture that would make me famous, and those who love me (supposing any one on earth takes that trouble) would not be compelled to believe me on my mere assurances, and would be furnished with a triumphant reply to the sardonic detractors of the great genius that I am.

I see many who pick up palette and brushes, and cover a canvas with colour without troubling themselves further about what fancy causes to appear under their brush, and others who write a hundred lines on

end without scratching out a word, or once looking up at the ceiling. I always admire those people, even if I do not admire their work; I envy with all my heart their delightful intrepidity and their happy blindness which prevents their seeing their most glaring faults. But the moment I have done a bit of bad drawing I see it, and it worries me beyond measure, and being much better at the theory than the practice, it often happens that I am unable to correct a mistake of which I am conscious. Then I turn my canvas with its face to the wall, and never touch it again. The idea of perfection is so very present to my mind that disgust for my work takes hold of me at once, and prevents my going on with it.

Ah! when I compare the sweet smile of my conception with the ugly face it makes on the canvas or the paper, when I see flapping by an ugly bat instead of the fair dream which outspread its wings of light in the bosom of my night, when I see a thistle come up instead of a rose, and hear the braying of an ass when I expected to be thrilled by the suave melodiousness of the nightingale, I am so horribly disappointed, so angry with myself, so mad at my own impotence, that I resolve never again to write or speak a single word,

rather than commit such high treason against my thoughts.

I cannot even manage to write a letter in the way I would; I often say something quite different. Certain parts are amplified to excess, others abbreviated to attenuation, and very frequently the idea I desired to express is wholly absent or appears only in the postscript.

When I began writing to you I certainly did not intend to say one half of what I have said. I merely intended to let you know that we were going to give a play; but the word brings on the sentence; the parentheses are big with other little parentheses that, in their turn, are full of others of the same kind ready to come forth. There is no reason why this sort of thing should ever end, why it should not be prolonged through two hundred folio volumes — which would unquestionably be too much.

The moment I pick up my pen my brain is alive with a buzzing and a whirring of wings as if clouds of chafers had been let loose in it. The buzz and whir collides with the walls of my skull, turns, descends with horrible uproar; it is my thoughts trying to fly forth and seeking an issue. They all endeavour

to get out at once; more than one breaks its legs and tears the gauze of its wings, and at times the door is so crowded with them that not one can cross the threshold and reach the paper.

Such is my make-up, — imperfect, no doubt, but whose is the fault? Not mine, certainly, who cannot help it, but that of the gods. I need not ask for indulgence on your part, dear Silvio; it is mine without the asking, and you peruse to the very end my illegible scrawls, my aimless and formless reveries. Disconnected and absurd though they be, they always interest you because they are mine, and whatever comes from me, bad though it may be, is valued by you. I may let *you* see what most revolts ordinary mortals — sincere pride. But let us call a truce to all these fine things, and, since it is of the play we are to give that I am writing to you, let us return to it and talk of it a little.

The rehearsal took place to-day, and never have I been so upset in my life, — not because of the nervousness inseparable from having to declaim something before many people, but for another reason. We were dressed and ready to begin; Theodore alone had not arrived. We sent to his room to find out what

was delaying him, and he sent back word that he would soon be ready and was on the point of coming down.

He came, in fact. I heard his step in the hall long before he appeared, and yet no one treads as lightly as he does; but the sympathy I feel for him is so great that I divine, as it were, what he is doing even when we are separated by walls, and when I felt he was going to grasp the door-handle I began to tremble and my heart beat atrociously fast. It seemed to me that a crisis in my life had come, and that I had reached a long expected solemn moment.

The door opened and closed slowly. There was one universal cry of admiration. The men applauded, the ladies flushed crimson. Rosette alone turned excessively pale and leaned against the wall, as if a sudden light had come to her. She made inversely the same movement as I. I have always suspected that she was in love with Theodore.

Undoubtedly, at that moment she thought, as I did, that the fictitious Rosalind was in very truth none other than a young and lovely woman, and the rickety air-castle of her hopes crashed suddenly to the ground, whilst mine rose again from its ruins. At least that

is what I thought; I may perhaps be mistaken, for I was in no condition to make accurate observations.

Apart from Rosette, three or four pretty women were present; they all seemed to be revoltingly ugly. By the side of that sun the star of their beauty was suddenly eclipsed, and we all asked ourselves how we could have thought them passable even. Men who, up till now, would have counted themselves fortunate to have them for mistresses, would scarce have accepted them as servants.

The image which until now had showed but faintly and in scarce defined outline, the adored phantom pursued in vain, stood there before me, living, tangible, no longer in mist and half-light, but bathed in floods of white light; not under a vain disguise, but in its real dress; not under the derisive form of a youth, but with the features of the loveliest of women.

I experienced a feeling of mighty comfort, as if a mountainous weight had been lifted off my chest. I felt my horror of myself vanish, and I was freed from the misery of looking on myself as a monster. I got to having a most pastoral opinion of myself, and all the violets of spring bloomed anew in my heart.

He, or she, rather (for I will not allow myself to

remember that I was ass enough to mistake her for a man), remained one moment motionless on the threshold, as if to give us all time to utter our first exclamation. A brilliant beam lighted her up from head to foot, and against the dark background of the hall, which grew less dense beyond, the carved jambs and lintel of the door framing her in, she shone radiant, just as if the light came from her instead of being merely reflected, and she looked more like a marvellous work of the painter's brush than like a being of flesh and blood.

Her long brown hair, with cords of great pearls twisted in it, fell in natural curls down her beautiful cheeks. Her shoulders and bosom were bare, and never have I seen anything fairer in this world; the purest marble did not approach her exquisite perfection. Life could be seen coursing under the transparent shadows; the skin was white and flushed at one and the same time; harmoniously golden shades made a happy transition between the skin and the hair; the soft curves of her neck, more supple and velvety than that of the swan, were ravishing poems. If there were words to express what I feel, I would send you a description covering fifty pages, but languages have been

made by dolts who had never looked at a woman's back or bosom, and half the indispensable terms are wanting.

Really I think that I shall have to turn sculptor, for it is enough to drive one mad to have seen such beauty and to be unable to reproduce it in some way. I have written twenty sonnets on her shoulders, but they are not enough; I want something tangible and exactly like; verse reproduces merely the shadow of beauty, and not beauty itself. The painter obtains a more accurate reproduction, but it is only an appearance. Sculpture is as real as a sham can be; it has so many sides, it casts a shadow and is tangible. Your mistress in sculpture differs from the original merely in that it is rather harder, and cannot talk, — two but slight defects.

Her dress was made of shot stuff, showing azure in the light or in the shade; close-fitting buskins shod feet which did not require this aid to be too small, and scarlet silk stockings clung amorously to the most beautifully turned and alluring legs. Her arms were bare to the elbows, where they emerged, round, plump, white, and splendid as burnished silver, and of incredible beauty of shape, from a fluffiness of lace. From

her hands, covered with rings, dangled a great fan of many strangely coloured feathers which looked like a pocket rainbow.

She came into the room, her cheek flushed with a colour that was not due to rouge, every one expressing ecstatic astonishment and wondering if it were possible that this was indeed Theodore de Sérannes, the bold horseman, the insatiable duellist, the resolute sportsman, and whether he was quite sure that he was not his own twin sister.

One would have sworn he had never worn any other dress, for he was not in the least awkward, walking in it with ease and never getting entangled in his train, while he used his eyes and his fan with consummate art. Then his waist was so small — it could have been clasped with one hand. Prodigious! marvellous! The illusion was perfect; one could have sworn he had breasts, so plump and full was his chest, and besides, not a hair on his face, not a single solitary one. And so sweet a voice! A fair Rosalind indeed, and who would not be her Orlando?

Yes, who would not be Orlando to her, even at the cost of the torments I have suffered? To love, as I did, with a monstrous love, never to be confessed,

but which one cannot uproot from one's heart; to be condemned, as I was, to preserve the deepest silence, and to have to forbid one's self what the most discreet and respectful lover would fearlessly say to the most prudish and most stand-off of women; to be devoured by insensate fires, inexcusable even in the eyes of the most abandoned libertines,—what are ordinary passions compared with that, a passion shameful in itself, hopeless, and the improbable satisfaction of which would be a crime and would kill you with the shame of it? To be reduced to pray for failure, to dread favouring chances and opportunities, and to avoid them as carefully as another would seek them, such was my fate.

I had sunk into the deepest discouragement; I contemplated myself with a sense of horror mingled with surprise and curiosity. What was chiefly revolting to me was that I had never loved before, and that this mad passion was the first effervescence of youth in me, the first bloom of my springtime of love.

This monstrous thing had taken in me the place of the fresh and chaste illusions of youth. So then my dreams of love, so tenderly caressed at eve, on the edge of the woods, on the narrow crimsoned paths, or along

the white-marble terraces near the pond in the park, were to be transformed into that perfidious sphinx, with the doubtful smile, the ambiguous voice, in front of which I stood without venturing to read the riddle. To read it wrongly would have been death to me, for alas! it is the only link that binds me to earth; once it breaks, all will be over with me. Take that one spark from me and I become more deathly and inanimate than the mummy of the oldest Pharaoh in its bonds of linen bands.

At the very times when I felt most strongly drawn towards Theodore I threw myself with terror back into Rosette's arms, although she was infinitely distasteful to me. I tried to use her as a barrier and a shield between him and me, and I felt secret complacency, when lying by her side, at the thought that she, at least, was indubitably a woman, and that, if I had ceased to love her, I was still sufficiently loved by her to prevent our relationship degenerating into mere intrigue and debauch.

Yet I felt withal, deep within me, a sort of regret at being thus unfaithful to the thought of my impossible passion; I reproached myself with it as if it were an act of treason; and although well aware that

I should never possess the object of my love, I was angry with myself and became once more cold to Rosette.

The rehearsal went off much better than I had ventured to hope. Theodore especially was splendid, and I also was considered to have played in a superior fashion. That was not due, however, to my possessing the qualities which one needs in order to be a good actor, and it would be a great mistake to suppose that I am capable of playing other parts equally well; but by singular fortune, the words I had to speak were so well suited to my situation that they seemed to be of my own invention rather than learned from a book. Had my memory played me false in certain places I should assuredly not have hesitated a moment to fill the gap with improvised words. Orlando was as much myself as I was Orlando, and a more remarkable coincidence would be impossible.

In the wrestling scene, when Theodore took the chain from his neck and presented it to me, as is laid down in the part, he gave me a look so softly languorous, so full of promises, and he uttered with such grace and nobleness the words, "Fair sir, wear this in memory of me, — of a maiden who would fain give

you more had she more to give," that I was fairly upset, and I could scarce return: "What passion ties my tongue and binds it with fetters? I cannot speak to her, yet doth she desire to entertain me. O wretched Orlando!"

In the third act, Rosalind, dressed in male attire and bearing the name of Ganymede, reappears with her cousin, who has changed her name to Aliena. The impression I then received was painful. I had already grown so accustomed to the woman's dress which permitted my desire to harbour some hope and kept up a perfidious but seductive error! We quickly accustom ourselves to look upon our wishes as realised, upon the faith of the most fleeting appearances, and I became quite gloomy when Theodore reappeared in his man's dress, — gloomier than I had been before; for joy but brings out grief more strongly, the sun but deepens the horror of darkness, and the brightness of white is intended but to enhance the full sadness of black. His coat was most gallant and coquettish, elegantly and fancifully cut, and richly adorned with frillings and ribbons, somewhat in the fashion of the "moulds of form" of the Court of Louis XIII; a high-crowned felt hat, with long curly feather, shaded

his beautiful locks, and a damascened sword cocked up his travelling-cloak.

Yet he was dressed in a way that made one feel there was a female filling to these masculine garments; the greater width of the hips, the greater fulness of the bosom, something of wavy that stuffs never show on a man's form, left but slight doubts as to the sex of the wearer.

He had a semi-deliberate, semi-timid look most amusing to behold; with infinite art he had managed to give himself an air of being as ill at ease in a dress he daily wore, as he had of being quite at his ease in an attire unfamiliar to him.

I recovered somewhat my peace of mind, and again I persuaded myself that he was in very deed a woman. I became collected enough to proceed properly with my part.

Do you know the play? Perhaps not. For the past fortnight I have been doing nothing but read and spout it, and I know it all by heart, so I cannot conceive that everybody else is not as fully cognizant of the knot and the plot as I am myself. I am rather given to making the mistake of fancying, when I am drunk, that the whole world is drunk and lurching

against the walls, and if I knew Hebrew you may be sure I should tell my servant in Hebrew to bring me my dressing-gown and my slippers, and I should be much surprised if he did not understand me. You shall read the play if you like; meanwhile I shall assume that you have read it and I shall refer to those parts only which bear upon the situation in which I find myself.

Rosalind, walking in the forest with her cousin, is greatly surprised to find that the bushes bear, instead of blackberries and brambleberries, madrigals in her praise, strange fruits, which are not, happily, in the habit of growing there, for it is much preferable, when one is athirst, to come upon good berries than poor sonnets. Celia, who has already met Orlando, tells her, after much pressing, that the author of the verses is none other than the youth who vanquished Charles, the duke's wrestler.

Orlando himself soon appears, and Rosalind opens the conversation by inquiring the time of day. This is certainly an extremely simple opening; there cannot well be anything more commonplace. But do not fear; out of that commonplace, every-day phrase will forthwith spring up a crop of unexpected concetti, full

of quaint flowers and comparisons, as from the most fertile and well-enriched soil.

After a few lines of sparkling dialogue, in which every word, as it strikes the sentence, sends flying right and left a shower of mad sparks, as a hammer strikes them from a red-hot iron bar, Rosalind asks Orlando if perchance he knows the man who hangs odes upon hawthorns and elegies on brambles, and who seems to have the quotidian of love upon him, — a disorder for which she possesses a certain cure. Orlando owns to her that he is himself the love-shak'd swain, and that since he, Ganymede, boasts of having more than one infallible recipe for the cure of the malady, he will do him the favour of giving him one. "You in love?" replies Rosalind; "there is none of the true lover's marks upon you: a lean cheek, which you have not; a blue eye and sunken, which you have not; your hose should be ungarter'd, your sleeve unbutton'd, but on the contrary the ribbon on your shoe is most gracefully tied. If you are in love it is with your own self, and my remedies are of no use to you."

It was with real feeling that I replied in the words of my part, which I here set down textually, —

"Fair youth, I would I could make thee believe I love."

That utterly unexpected, utterly strange reply, for which no preparation is made, and which a poet's foresight seemed to have written expressly for me, impressed me deeply as I spoke it to Theodore, whose divine lips still pouted slightly with the ironic expression in the words he had just uttered, whilst his eyes smiled with inexpressible sweetness, and a bright beam of kindness lighted all the upper part of his young and lovely face.

"Me believe it! You may as soon make her that you love believe it; which, I warrant, she is apter to do than to confess she does; that is one of the points in the which women still give the lie to their consciences. But, in good sooth, are you he that hangs the verses on the trees, wherein Rosalind is so admired? And do you really need a remedy for your lunacy?"

When she has fully assured herself that it is indeed Orlando, and none else, who has rimed these admirable many-footed verses, fair Rosalind consents to impart her recipe to him. It consists in this: she pretended to be the fair of the love-sick swain, who was set to court her as if she were really his mistress, and in order to disgust him with his love, she indulged in the most fantastic caprices — now weeping, now laughing;

now welcoming, now repulsing him; she scratched him, spat in his face; was never two minutes the same, — coquettish, flighty, prudish, languorous; she was all in turns and, besides, all that boredom, vapours, and blue devils can suggest in the way of disjointed fancies to an empty-headed coquette; all this the poor devil had to bear with or had to perform. A will o' the wisp, a monkey, and an attorney rolled into one could not have invented more tricks. This miraculous treatment had not failed to produce its effect; the patient had been driven from his mad humour of love to a living humour of madness; which was, to forswear the full stream of this world, and to live in a nook merely monastic, — a most satisfactory result, which, besides, might reasonably be expected.

Orlando, it will readily be believed, cares little to recover his health by such means, but Rosalind insists, and is resolved to undertake the cure. And she spoke these words, "I would cure you if you would but call me Rosalind, and come every day to my cote and woo me," with so marked and plain a meaning, and casting on me a glance so strange, that I could not avoid giving it a wider import than the words themselves contain, or refrain from understanding it as an

indirect invitation to declare my real feelings. And when Orlando replies, "With all my heart, good youth," she said, still more significantly and as if annoyed at not being understood, "Nay, you must call me Rosalind."

I may have been mistaken and have fancied I saw what was not there, but it seemed to me that Theodore had perceived my love, although I never breathed a word of it to him, and that under the veil of these borrowed expressions, under the stage mask, with these hermaphrodite speeches, he alluded to his real sex and to the situation we were in. It is out of the question that so clever a woman as she is, who has so great a knowledge of the world, should have failed to discern, from the very outset, what was going on in my heart. If my lips were closed, my eyes and my emotions spoke plainly enough, and the veil of ardent friendship I had thrown over my love was not so impenetrable but that an attentive and interested observer could easily see through it. The most innocent girl, with the least knowledge of the world, would not have been stopped a minute by it.

Some important reason, which I cannot fathom, no doubt compels the lady to wear that accursed disguise,

the cause of all my torments, which nearly made an abnormal lover out of me. But for that disguise all would have gone smoothly, easily, like a carriage with well-oiled wheels on a smooth, level road sprinkled with fine sand; I might have allowed myself to indulge in fullest security the most amorously vagabond reveries, and to take in my hand the little white, satiny hand of my goddess without shuddering with horror and starting back twenty paces, as if I had touched a red-hot iron or felt the claws of Beelzebub himself.

Instead of being in a state of despair and agitation, like a lunatic, of worrying myself into feeling remorse and grieving because I do not feel it, I should have said to myself, every morning as I stretched out my arms, with a feeling of duty accomplished and with a conscience at peace, "I am in love;" which is just as pleasant a sentence of three or four words as any other of the same length that one can think of to say in the morning, with one's head on a downy pillow — save, nevertheless, this one, "I have money."

After rising I should have planted myself in front of my mirror, and, gazing on myself with a sort of respect, I should have been moved, while combing my hair, by my poetic pallor, and I should have resolved

to turn it to good account and use it to the utmost, for there is nothing so ignoble as to make love with a crimson face. When a man is so unfortunate as to be high-complexioned and in love, I believe he ought to whiten his face every day, or give up being in the fashionable set and keep to the Mollies and Biddies.

Next, I should have breakfasted solemnly and gravely in order to feed up my beloved body, that precious casket of passion, to make for it, out of the juices of meat and game, good amorous chyle, good hot, quick blood, and to maintain it in a condition to give pleasure to charitable souls.

After breakfast, while picking my teeth, I should have woven together some quaint lines, cast in the mould of a sonnet, in honour of my princess, discovering many a comparison, each more novel than the others and infinitely gallant. In the first quatrain, a dance of the suns; in the second, a minuet performed by the cardinal virtues; nor would the terzetti have been inferior in taste; Helen would have been described as a tavern wench, and Paris as an idiot; the East could not have surpassed the gorgeousness of my metaphors, and the last line would have been peculiarly admirable, containing at least two concetti to every

syllable; for the sting of the scorpion is in its tail, and the value of a sonnet lies in the closing line. The sonnet thoroughly perfected, and well and duly transcribed on cream-laid, scented paper, I should have gone forth one hundred cubits tall, and bowing my head lest I struck the heavens and brought down the clouds (a wise precaution), and I should have gone to recite my latest performance to all my friends and foes, then to babes and sucklings, and to their nurses, then to horses and apes, to trees and walls, so as to get some inkling of what creation thought of this most recent product of my inspiration.

In the drawing-rooms I should have spoken with the ladies with a most learned air, and maintained sentimental theories in a grave and measured tone of voice, like a man who knows infinitely more than he cares to say on the matter in hand, and whose learning is not derived from books. This never fails to produce an amazing effect, and causes all the ladies of an uncertain age present — as well as the few little girls who have not been asked to dance — to gasp like fish out of water.

I could have led the happiest of lives, trod on the pug's tail without making its mistress scream over-

much, upset tables laden with china, eaten up the best dish at table and left none for any one else, and all would have been excused on the ground of a lover's well-known absent-mindedness. People seeing me swallow everything with a distracted look on my face, would have clasped their hands and said, "Poor fellow!"

Then the sad, dreamy look, the woebegone hair, the wrinkled stockings, the badly tied cravat, the long arms hanging down, I should have indulged in! And how I should have travelled along the park walks, sometimes striding, sometimes with mincing steps, like a man who has lost his wits! And how I should have stared at the moon, and spat into the water in perfect peace!

But the gods ordered otherwise.

I have fallen in love with a beauty in doublet and long boots, with a proud Bradamante who disdains the apparel of her sex and plunges you at times into the most parlous perplexity. Her features and her form are of a verity the form and features of a woman, but her mind is unquestionably virile.

My mistress is a first-class swordswoman, and could give points to the most experienced professor of fencing; she has fought I know not how many duels, and has killed or wounded three or four men. She can

leap her horse across a ten-foot ditch, and hunts like an old country squire; which are extraordinary acquirements for one's lady-love to possess. But that is always the way with me.

Though I laugh, it is no laughing matter, for never have I suffered so much, and the last two months seemed two years, nay, two centuries to me. A constant ebb and flow of uncertainty, fit to reduce the strongest brain to idiocy, rose and fell in my head; I was so fiercely agitated and dragged hither and thither, I was a prey to such mad impulses, such complete atony, such extravagant hopes and deep despair, that I fail to understand why I did not sink under the burden. That one thought so filled, so engrossed me that I wonder it was not as plainly visible through my earthly frame as a candle in a lantern; and I was in mortal terror lest any one should discover the object of my insensate love. Yet Rosette, who was most deeply interested in observing the movements of my heart, does not seem to have noticed anything; I believe she herself was too much engrossed with love for Theodore to mark my growing coolness towards herself, or else I am a past master of dissimulation, and I am not conceited enough to believe that. Until to-day Theodore

himself has not exhibited the least sign of suspecting the state of my feelings, and he has always talked to me in the familiar and friendly way of a well-bred young man to a young man of his own age, but nothing more. Our talk turned indifferently upon all sorts of subjects, on art, poetry, and kindred topics, but never on anything intimate or direct that might refer to him or to me.

Perhaps the reasons which compelled him to adopt his disguise no longer exist, and he will soon resume his proper habiliments. I know not, but this is certain, that Rosalind spoke certain words with a peculiar inflection, and that she dwelt in very marked fashion upon all the lines in her part which had a double meaning and which might be taken in that particular sense.

In the meeting scene, from the moment when she reproaches Orlando for not having come two hours earlier, as beseems a man truly in love, instead of two hours later, until the dolorous sigh she utters as, terrified at the violence of her passion, she throws herself into Aliena's arms, — "O coz, coz, coz, my pretty little coz, that thou didst know how many fathom deep I am in love!" — she displayed miraculous talent,

mingling irresistibly tenderness, melancholy, and love. Her voice trembled with emotion, and one felt that her laugh concealed the most passionate love on the point of breaking forth. Add to all this the piquancy and singularity of the transposition and the novelty of seeing a young man pay court to his mistress whom he takes for a youth, and who has all the outward appearance of being so.

Expressions which would have been ordinary and commonplace in other situations, became striking under these circumstances, and all that current stage coin of amorous comparisons and protestations seemed to have passed afresh through the mint. Besides, even had the thoughts, instead of being as delicate and charming as they are, been worn more threadbare than a judge's robe or the saddle-cloth of an ass standing for hire, the fashion in which they were spoken would have imparted to them the most excellent wit and taste.

I forgot to tell you that Rosette, after having refused to play Rosalind, had kindly undertaken the subordinate part of Phebe, a shepherdess in the forest of Arden, madly loved by Silvius, a shepherd, whom she cannot tolerate and whom she overwhelms with her coldness. Phebe is icy as the moon, whose name

she bears; her heart is of snow, that melts not in the breath of the most ardent sighs, but the frozen crust of which thickens more and more and becomes hard as adamant. Scarcely, however, has she beheld Rosalind under the apparel of the handsome page Ganymede than the ice melts into tears and the diamond becomes softer than wax. Proud Phebe, who laughed at love, is herself in love, and now endures the torments she inflicted upon others. She sinks her pride to the point of making all the advances, and sends to Rosalind, by poor Silvius, a burning letter containing the avowal of her passion couched in the humblest and most suppliant terms. Rosalind, pitying Silvius, and having, besides, the best reasons in the world not to return Phebe's love, subjects her to the harshest treatment and laughs at her with unparalleled cruelty and persistency. Nevertheless, Phebe prefers these insults to the daintiest and most passionate madrigals of her unhappy swain; she follows the handsome stranger everywhere, and by dint of importunities obtains the poor promise that if he ever wed with woman she shall certainly be the chosen one; meanwhile, he advises her to treat Silvius decently and not to deceive herself with too flattering a hope.

Rosette played her part with a mournful, caressing grace, and spoke in a pained and resigned tone that went to the heart; and when Rosalind said to her, "I would love you, if I could," the tears nearly welled from her eyes, and she found it difficult to restrain them, for Phebe's story is hers, as Orlando's is mine, saving this difference, that all ends happily for Orlando, while Phebe, deceived in her love, is reduced to wed Silvius, instead of the lovely ideal she sought to embrace. Such is life; one man's happiness is another man's curse. It is lucky for me that Theodore is a woman and very unfortunate for Rosette that he is not a man, for she is now stranded amid the love impossibilities by which I was but recently beset.

At the end of the play Rosalind exchanges the doublet of Ganymede the page for the garments proper to her sex, and makes herself known to the duke as his daughter, to Orlando as his mistress, and the god Hymen arrives with his saffron liveries and his legitimising torches. Three weddings take place: Orlando weds Rosalind; Phebe, Silvius; and Touchstone the clown, Audrey the simple wench. Then the epilogue speaks its farewell and the curtain falls.

The whole thing interested and enthralled us greatly. It was in some sort a play within a play, a drama invisible and unknown to the other spectators, which we were playing for ourselves alone, and which, with its symbolical expressions, summed up our whole life and expressed our most secret desires. But for Rosalind's curious remedy, I should be worse than ever, without even the hope of a distant cure, and I should continue to wander sadly in the oblique paths of the dark forest.

I am, however, merely morally certain. I have no proofs, and cannot longer remain in this state of uncertainty. I must at all costs speak more directly to Theodore. A score of times I have gone up to him with a phrase ready prepared and have been unable to utter it. I dare not. I have opportunities enough to speak to him alone, either in the park, in my room, or in his, for he calls on me and I on him, but I let them slip without turning them to account, although the very next minute I bitterly regret it and rage at myself. I open my lips, and in spite of myself other words replace the words I would say; instead of telling my love, I prose about the weather or some such idiotic nonsense. Meanwhile the season draws to a

close, and soon all will return to town; the opportunities I enjoy here I shall not again have; we shall lose sight of each other and contrary currents will no doubt carry us away.

The freedom of the country is most delightful and convenient. The trees, even somewhat stripped of their leaves by the autumn, offer such delicious shades to the reveries of nascent love. It is difficult to resist when in the bosom of fair nature; so languorous is the song of birds, so intoxicating the scent of flowers, so golden and shining is the sward on the hill-slopes. Solitude suggests innumerable voluptuous thoughts that would vanish in the whirl of society or fly here and there, and two beings who are listening to the beating of their own hearts in the loneliness and silence of the country are naturally moved to clasp each other more closely, as if they were indeed the only living beings on earth.

I strolled out this morning; the air was soft and moist, there was not a patch of blue visible in the heavens, and yet they were neither sombre nor menacing. Two or three pearly tints, melting harmoniously one into another, bathed the whole extent of sky, and over this vaporous background slowly drifted white

clouds like great masses of wool, driven by the dying breath of a light air scarce sufficient to move the tops of the most quivering of aspens; the course of the stream was marked by the wisps of mist that rose between the great horse-chestnut trees. When the air freshened, a few reddened and browned leaves would scatter tremblingly and fly before me like flocks of frightened sparrows; then, as it died away again, they fluttered to earth a few yards farther on,—apt emblems of those spirits mistaken for birds flying free on the wing, which are, after all, but leaves killed by the morning frost, and which become the playthings of the first breath of wind that blows their way.

The distance was so softened by haze, and the edges of the horizon so dimmed, that it was hard to tell exactly where earth ended and the sky began; only a slightly more opaque greyness, a somewhat denser haze suggested vaguely the distance and the difference between the various stretches. Through this veil, the willows, with their ashen-coloured tops, looked more like the ghosts of trees than like real trees; the outlines of the hills resembled more the undulations of cloudy masses than solid ground. The contours of objects were tremulous, and an inexpressibly tenuous,

cobweb-like grey veil hung between the foreground of the landscape and the distant prospect; in the darker parts, the lines stood out much more plainly, and allowed the meshes of the web to become visible; in the high lights the wisp of mist was invisible, and lost itself in a diffused luminosity. The air had a drowsy, moist, warm, soft, undecided feel about it, which greatly conduced to melancholy.

As I walked I reflected that autumn had come upon me also, and that the radiant summer had gone, never to return. The tree of my soul was even barer, perhaps, than the trees of the forest, and scarce did there remain on the highest branch a single little green leaflet, swaying and quivering, saddened at seeing its sisters leave it one by one.

Remain on the tree, thou little leaf, the colour of hope; cling to the branch with all the strength of thy fibres and thy markings; be not dismayed by the whistling of the wind, O dear little leaf! for when thou too shalt have left me who shall tell whether I am a dead or a living tree, and who shall stay the woodman's axe from cutting me down and making faggots out of my branches? The time has not yet come when the trees are bare of leaves,

and the sun may yet emerge from the folds of mist that envelop it.

The sight of the dying season impressed me deeply. I reflected that time was flying swiftly, and that death might overtake me ere I could press my ideal to my heart.

On returning to my room I made up my mind. Since I could not bring myself to speak, I wrote my fate on a square of paper. It is ridiculous, mayhap, to write to one who lives in the same house with you and whom you may see every day and at any time, but I have got past thinking of what is or is not ridiculous.

I sealed my letter, not without trembling and turning pale; then, choosing the time when Theodore had gone out, I placed it in the centre of the table and fled, as much agitated as if I had just committed the vilest of deeds.

XII

I PROMISED to tell you the rest of my adventures, but I am such a poor hand at letter-writing that if I did not love you as the apple of mine eye, and did not know you to be as full of curiosity as Eve or Psyche, I could not bring myself to sit down to a table with a great sheet of white paper which I must blacken all over, and an inkstand deeper than the sea, every drop of ink in which is to be transmuted into thoughts, or at least into something resembling thoughts, and not suddenly resolve to mount and ride the eighty long leagues, more or less, which separate us, in order to tell you by word of mouth what I am going to put down in microscopic scratchings, so that the prodigious magnitude of my picaresque Odyssey may not terrify me.

Eighty leagues; to think there is all that distance between me and the being I love best on earth! I have a great mind to tear up my letter and to have my horse saddled. But I forgot — under the costume I wear I could not be near you and resume the familiar life we led together when we were artless and

innocent little girls. If ever I go back to petticoats, it will be for that reason.

I left off, if I remember right, just as I was leaving the inn where I spent such a funny night, and where my virtue was nearly wrecked as it was leaving port. We all started together, going in the same direction. My companions were loud in their praises of my horse, which is, as a matter of fact, a thorough-bred, and of the swiftest. I rose a foot at least in their good opinion, and the merit of my steed was added to my own. They appeared to fear, however, that it would prove too spirited and hot-tempered for me. I told them they might dismiss their fears, and, to show them there was no danger, I made my horse perform several curvets; then I leapt a pretty high fence and galloped off.

The company tried in vain to keep up with me. I turned back when I was sufficiently ahead, and rode at full speed to meet them. When I was close to them, I pulled up my horse on his four feet and stopped him short, which, as you know or do not know, is a regular feat of horsemanship.

They passed without transition from esteem to the deepest respect. They had not suspected that a

youth fresh from the university could be such a good horseman. This discovery did me more good with them than if they had found out I possessed every one of the theological and of the cardinal virtues; instead of treating me as a boy, they adopted a tone of obsequious familiarity which pleased me.

I had not dropped my pride with my petticoats. Having ceased to be a woman, I wished to be a man all over, and not merely externally. I was resolved upon winning in the guise of a man the triumphs I could no longer pretend to as a woman. What troubled me most was to know how I should manage to be brave, for courage and skill at bodily exercises are the means which enable a man to make a reputation most quickly. For a woman I am not timid, and I do not suffer from that stupid pusillanimity observed in many of our sex; but between that and the careless, ferocious brutality in which men glory, there is a long way. Now my intention was to become a small swashbuckler, a Bombastes Furioso like our gentlemen of fashion, so that I might be on a good footing in society and enjoy all the benefits of my metamorphosis.

Later on, however, I saw that nothing was easier, and that the recipe is a very simple one.

I shall not tell you, after the manner of travellers, that I rode so many miles one day, that I went from this place to that, that the roast I ate at the White Horse or the Iron Cross was underdone or overdone, that the wine was sour, and that the bed in which I slept had curtains on which were figured people or flowers; these be very important details, which it is well to preserve for posterity, but posterity will have to do without them this time, and you will have to be satisfied not to know how many courses I had at dinner, and whether I slept ill or well during my travels. Nor shall I treat you to an accurate description of the various landscapes, corn-fields, forests, divers crops, and hamlet-strewn hills which passed successively before mine eyes; you can readily imagine all these things. Take a little earth, stick in a few trees and blades of grass, dash off behind that a bit of greyish or pale-blue sky, and you will have a very good idea of the moving background against which showed our little caravan. I beg you to forgive my having indulged in some details of this sort in my first letter; I shall not do it again; never having been out before, the smallest trifles seemed important to me.

One of the company, my bed-fellow, the one whose sleeve I so nearly pulled on that memorable night the anxious moments in which I have fully described to you, took a great liking to me and constantly kept his horse near mine.

Bar the fact that I would not have had him for a lover, even had he laid at my feet the finest realm in the world, I had no dislike to him. He was well educated and lacked neither wit nor good temper; only, when he spoke about women it was in a tone of such contempt and irony that I would willingly have scratched out both his eyes, and the more willingly that, notwithstanding the exaggeration, he said many very true things which my male costume compelled me to admit were just.

He pressed me so much to come and visit with him a sister of his who was just coming out of mourning for her husband, and who was then living in an old *château* with one of her aunts, that I could not refuse. I made some objections for form's sake, but at bottom it was a matter of indifference to me whether I went there or elsewhere, for I could compass my ends just as readily in this way as in any other; and as he said that I would pain him greatly if I did not give him at

least a fortnight, I replied that I was quite willing to do so, and the matter was settled.

At a fork of the road my companion, pointing to the right branch of this natural Y said, "That is the way." We shook hands with the other members of the company, who rode on in the other direction.

After a few hours' ride we reached our destination. A fairly wide moat, filled, instead of water, with an abundant and luxurious vegetable growth, divided the park from the highroad; the revetment wall was of dressed stone, and from the angles projected gigantic iron artichokes and thistles, which seemed to have sprouted like real plants between the joints of the blocks forming the wall. A small bridge of a single arch spanned this dry moat and gave access to the entrance gates.

We entered an avenue of tall elms, arched like an arbour and trimmed in old-fashioned style; after having followed it for some time we debouched into a sort of round-point.

The trees seemed old-fashioned rather than old, and looked as if bewigged and powdered white. Only a small tuft of foliage at the very top had been preserved; all the rest had been carefully pruned, so

that they looked like huge feather-dusters planted at intervals.

After traversing the round-point, covered with a fine sward carefully rolled, we had to pass under a curious tree architecture adorned with firepots, pyramids, and columns of the rustic order, all produced by the lavish use of shears and bill-books in a huge clump of woods. Through cuttings here and there we perceived, now to the right, now to the left, sometimes a half ruinous rocaille mansion, sometimes the moss-grown steps of a dried up waterfall, or a vase, or a statue representing a nymph or a shepherd, nose and fingers gone, and occasionally pigeons perched on the shoulder or the head.

A great flower-garden, laid out in the French fashion, spread before the mansion. The various beds were bordered with box or holly, with uncompromising regularity, and made it look as much like a carpet as a garden. Tall flowers in full dress, majestic in port and serene of mien, like duchesses about to walk a minuet, gently bowed their heads as we passed. Others, less polite apparently, remained stiff and motionless like dowagers working at a tapestry. Shrubs of every possible shape, save and except their natural one, round,

square, pointed, triangular, in grey and green boxes, seemed to walk in procession along the great avenue and to lead you by the hand to the first steps of the outside staircase.

A few turrets, partially inclosed in more recent parts, broke the sky line of the building with the full height of their pointed slate-roofs, while their vanes, cut in swallow-tail shape, testified to a respectable antiquity. The windows of the centre block of the building all opened upon one long balcony ornamented with an iron balustrade richly wrought, and the others were framed in stone adorned with carved monograms and knots.

Four or five huge dogs rushed at us, barking loudly and leaping in prodigious fashion. They gambolled around the horses and jumped at their heads, paying special attention to my companion's steed, which, no doubt, they often visited in the stable or accompanied on rides.

The noise at last brought out a sort of servant, looking half like a peasant and half like an hostler, who took our horses and led them off. I had not yet seen a living soul, save a little peasant-girl, as shy and wild as a deer, who had bolted at sight of us and hidden in

a furrow behind some hemp, although we repeatedly called to her and did our best to reassure her.

There was not a soul at any of the windows; the mansion seemed to be uninhabited or tenanted by ghosts only, for not a sound was audible from outside.

We were just climbing the first few steps of the outer stair, our spurs clanking, our legs being somewhat stiff, when we heard within the sound of doors opening and shutting, as if some one were hastening to meet us. In another moment, indeed, a young woman appeared at the top of the steps, bounded across the space which separated her from my companion, and threw herself on his neck. He embraced her very affectionately and clasping her round the waist he almost lifted her up and carried her thus to the top.

"You are a very gallant and amiable brother, dear Alcibiades. I may as well tell you, sir, that he is my brother, for his ways are rather more than brotherly," said the young beauty turning towards me.

Whereto I replied that it was plain enough he was, and that it was somewhat of a misfortune to be a brother to her, as one was thereby excluded from the category of her admirers; that were I her brother I should be at one and the same time the happiest and

the most wretched man on earth; whereupon she smiled gently.

While talking thus we entered a room on the ground-floor the walls of which were hung with Flanders tapestry. Great trees with pointed leaves harboured swarms of fantastic birds; the fading of the colours, due to time, had caused some curious transpositions of tints, the sky was green, the trees royal blue with the high lights in yellow, and the shadows of the draperies of the figures were frequently of a colour contrasting with that of the dress itself; the flesh tints looked like wood, and the nymphs wandering in the forest like mummies after they have been unwrapped; their lips alone, the red of which had preserved its original tint, smiled in somewhat life-like fashion. In the foreground rose up tall, straight plants of a peculiar green with big multi-coloured blooms, the pistils of which resembled peacocks' aigrettes. Serious, thoughtful-looking herons, their heads sunk between their shoulders, their long beaks resting on their swelling breasts, stood philosophically on one of their thin legs, in black, sleepy water with streaks like dull silver. Through the openings in the trees one caught sight in the distance of tiny *châteaux* with pointed-roofed turrets and

balconies full of fine ladies in fine clothes who were watching processions or hunting parties go by.

Rockeries with quaint outlines, from which fell torrents worked in white wool, were not easily distinguished from the dappled clouds on the horizon.

One thing particularly struck me. It was a huntress shooting at a bird. Her parted fingers had just loosed the cord of the bow, and the arrow had flown, but as this portion of the tapestry happened to be in a corner, the arrow was on the other side of the wall and formed a sharp angle. As for the bird it was flying with motionless wings, and seemed to be making for a near-by bough.

This feathered, gold-barbed arrow, always in the air and never reaching what it was aimed at, produced the queerest effect, and seemed like a sad and painful symbol of human destiny; the longer I gazed at it, the more I found in it a mysterious and sinister meaning. There stood the huntress, one foot forward, the knee bent, her eye, with its silken eyelids wide open, yet unable to see her arrow gone from its path direct; she seemed to be anxiously looking for the bird with the multi-coloured wings that she was trying to bring down and that she expected to see fall at her feet, shot

through and through. I know not whether it was merely a fancy of mine, but I saw in her face an expression as woebegone and desperate as that of a poet removed by death before he has written the work on which he reckoned to make his reputation, and whom the death-rattle seizes upon at the moment he is trying to dictate.

I am telling you a good deal about this tapestry, a great deal more unquestionably than it is worth, but the fantastic world called into being by the weavers of tapestry has always strangely interested me. I am passionately fond of that fanciful vegetation, of those flowers and plants which are not to be found on earth, of those forests of unknown trees in which wander unicorns and goats, and milk-white stags with a golden crucifix between their antlers are invariably pursued by red-bearded hunters dressed in Saracen costume.

When I was a child I could scarcely ever enter a room hung with tapestry without a shudder, and I hardly dared move about in it. Those figures standing against the wall, which the waving of the arras and the fire-light endowed with a sort of fantastic life, were to me so many spies busy watching what I was doing in order to report it at the proper time and

place, and I would never have dared to eat a purloined apple or cake in their presence.

How many things these serious personages could tell if they could open their red-thread mouths, and if sounds could penetrate the shell of their embroidered ears. Of how many murders, treasons, infamous adulteries, and abominations of all sorts have they not been silent and impassible witnesses!

But let me drop the tapestry and return to my tale.

"I shall let aunt know you have come, Alcibiades."

"No hurry for that, sister; let us sit down first and have a chat. I present to you this gentleman, Theodore de Sérannes by name, who is going to spend some time with us. I need not beg you to welcome him — he is his own best recommendation." (I am merely registering his own words; do not hastily accuse me of being conceited.)

The beauty nodded in assent, and we turned to other topics. While we talked I looked her over carefully and examined her more attentively than I had yet had opportunity to do.

She looked to be twenty-three to twenty-four, and her mourning became her uncommonly well. To tell

the truth, she did not seem very much cast down or afflicted, and I question whether she had eaten the ashes of her Mausoleus in her soup by way of rhubarb. I do not know whether she had wept copiously over her dead spouse; if she had there was but slight trace of it, and the pretty cambric handkerchief she held in her hand was as dry as a bone. Her eyes were not red; on the contrary, they were as bright and clear as possible, and you would have looked in vain on her cheeks for the furrow traced by her tears. In point of fact there were only two little dimples, due to a habit of smiling, and, for a widow, I am bound to say she very often allowed her teeth to be seen, — by no means an unpleasant sight either, for they were small and beautifully regular. She at once gained my good opinion because she had not thought it necessary, in consequence of the death of that husband of hers, to indulge in sunken eyes and a red nose; I was also grateful to her for not putting on sorrowful airs and for speaking naturally with her sonorous silvery voice, without dragging the words and interjecting virtuous sighs into her sentences. This struck me as being in good taste, and I put her down forthwith as a clever woman, and this she is in fact.

She is well made, with pretty hands and feet; she wore her black costume so coquettishly and so brightly that the gloom of the colour wholly vanished. She might have gone to a ball dressed as she then was, and nobody would have thought it strange. If I ever marry and become a widow, I shall ask her for the pattern of her dress, for it becomes her divinely.

After chatting a short time, we went up to the old aunt's room, and found her seated in a big arm-chair with sloping back, a small footstool under her feet, and by her side an old blear-eyed dog, which put up its black nose as we came in and received us with a most unfriendly growl.

I have never been able to look at old women without a feeling of horror. My own mother died when quite young; no doubt, if I had seen her grow old gradually, and had seen her features undergo an imperceptible deformation, I should have quietly got used to it. During my childhood I had around me only young and blooming faces, so that I have preserved an insurmountable antipathy to old people. When, therefore, the handsome widow pressed her sweet ruby lips to the parchment forehead of the old lady, I shuddered. I could not possibly do it. I know I shall be just

like that old woman when I am sixty; all the same, I cannot help it, and I pray God I may die young, as did my mother.

Yet this old lady had preserved from the wreck of her former beauty some simple, majestic traits which prevented her having that dried-apple ugliness which falls to the share of women who have been pretty or blooming only. Her eyes, though marked with crow-feet at the corners, and with heavy, falling eyelids, yet sparkled with something of their pristine fire, and it was easy to see that in the late king's reign they must have flashed the most dazzling glances. Her thin, delicate nose, shaped somewhat like the beak of a bird of prey, imparted to her profile a serious grandeur, tempered by the indulgent smile of her aristocratic lips, touched with carmine in the fashion of the last century.

Her dress was of another age without being ridiculous, and in perfect harmony with her face. Her head-dress consisted of a plain white cap with an edging of lace; her long, thin hands, which still showed how beautiful they had been, emerged from fingerless mittens; a dress, leaf-brown in colour, and with brocaded design in a darker shade, a black

mantilla, and a silk apron, of changing colours, completed her attire.

Old ladies should always dress in that way and have respect enough for their approaching demise not to cover themselves with feathers, wreaths of flowers, delicate-hued ribbons, and countless adornments which are suited to high youth alone. It is in vain they court life — it will have none of them ; they are wasting their pains, like aged courtesans who paint and rouge, and whom drunken muleteers kick into the gutter with an oath.

The old lady received us with that exquisite ease of manner and politeness which have fallen to the share of those who formed part of the former court, and the secret of which appears to be dying out day by day, like so many other valuable secrets, and with a voice which, though broken and quavering, was still passing sweet.

She seemed to take a great fancy to me and looked at me long and very attentively with a look of deep emotion. A tear glistened in her eye and fell slowly into one of her wrinkles where it disappeared and dried up. She begged me to excuse her, saying that I was very like a boy of hers, who had been killed in battle.

During the whole of my stay in the house I was, thanks to this real or fancied likeness, treated by the good lady with the most extraordinary and motherly kindness. It gave me greater pleasure than I could have believed at the outset; for the greatest favour old people can do me is never to speak to me and to leave when I arrive.

I shall not relate to you in detail my doings from day to day at R——. If I have dwelt at some length upon this earlier part and taken some pains to draw these two or three portraits of people and descriptions of places, it is because I have had some very strange, though very natural experiences, that I ought to have foreseen when I adopted a manly garb.

My natural heedlessness led me to commit an imprudent mistake which I bitterly regret; for it has caused pain to a dear and lovely woman, — pain which I cannot allay without revealing who I am and compromising myself seriously.

In order to play perfectly my part as a man, and also to have some fun, it occurred to me to pay court to my friend's sister. It struck me as extraordinarily funny to throw myself on all-fours when she dropped her glove and to return it to her with low bows; to

bend over the back of her chair with the most delightfully lovesick look, and to whisper in her ear endless charming compliments. Whenever she desired to pass into another room, I gracefully offered my hand; if she rode out, I held her stirrup and after starting I kept constantly close to her side; in the evening I read to her and sang with her, — in a word, I fulfilled most scrupulously the duty of a *cavaliere servente*.

I imitated every expression I had seen on lovers' faces, which caused me deep delight and made me laugh like the madcap I am, once I was alone in my room and recalled all the impertinent nonsense I had just been talking in the gravest way.

Alcibiades and the old marchioness appeared to be pleased with our intimacy and very often left us alone together. Sometimes I positively regretted not being a man, so that I might turn my opportunities to better account. Had I been a man I could have had my way with her, for the lovely widow seemed to have quite forgotten the late lamented, or, if she remembered him she was perfectly willing to be unfaithful to his memory.

Having started on this tack I could not decently draw back, and an honourable retreat would have been

very difficult to effect. On the other hand, I could not go beyond a certain point, and my love-making had perforce to be confined to pretty speeches. I hoped thus to reach the end of the month I was to spend at R——, and to leave after promising to return, a promise I would not have kept. I believed that once I was gone my beauty would console herself, and that when I was out of sight I should soon be out of mind.

But my trifling had awakened a serious love, and matters turned out very differently; a proof of a truth well known from olden times, namely, that one must never play with fire or love.

Rosette had not known what it is to love before she met me. Married, when very young, to a man greatly her senior, all she had felt for him was a sort of filial affection. Of course she had been courted, but she had had no lover, strange as it may seem, for either the gallants who had paid attention to her were not very seductive or, which is more likely, her hour had not yet come. The country squires and bumpkins whose whole talk turned on fumets and leashes, punches and antlers, hornblowings and stags of ten tines, with a mixture of charades learned from almanacs and of

moss-eaten madrigals, were unquestionably scarce fitted to commend themselves to her, and her virtue had not been compelled to make much of a fight in self-defence. Besides, the brightness and the natural playfulness of her character sufficiently protected her against love, that tender passion which has such a hold on dreamers and melancholy people. The experience of voluptuousness she had gone through with her aged Tithonus must have given her so poor an idea of it as not to tempt her greatly to taste it again, and she therefore enjoyed quietly the pleasure of being a widow at an early age, and of having many a year of loveliness still before her.

But my coming brought about a great change. At first I believed that had I kept, in my intercourse with her, within the narrow bounds of cool and precise courtesy, she would not have paid any particular attention to me. Later, however, I was forced to the conclusion that this would have made no difference, and that my assumption, though distinctly modest, was absolutely gratuitous. Alas! nothing can ward off the fatal ascendency and no one can avoid the beneficent or malevolent influence of his star.

Rosette was fated to love but once in her life, and

to feel an impossible love; she must fulfil her fate and will fulfil it.

I have been loved, O Graciosa! and it is most sweet, though it has been by a woman only, and though in this misguided love there enters an element of pain which is not to be met with in the other — oh! a most sweet thing. When you awake at night and raise yourself on your elbow, it is fine to be able to say to yourself: "Some one thinks or dreams of me; is interested in my life; a single motion of my eyes or my lips makes some one else sad or happy; a word dropped by chance by me is treasured, commented upon, turned over for hours at a time. I am the pole to which turns a restless needle; my eyes are her heaven, my lips a paradise more desired than God's. If death overtakes me, hot tears will warm my ashes; my tomb will be covered with more flowers than are given to a bride. Should danger threaten me, some one would throw herself between my breast and the sword's point; she would die for me." I know not what more can be wished for in this world.

I reproached myself for taking pleasure in these thoughts, for I had nothing to give in return. I was in the position of a poor person who accepts presents

from a rich and generous friend, without hope of ever being able to make any in return. I was charmed at being loved thus, and at times I let myself be loved with a feeling of marked complacency. By dint of hearing every one say "sir" to me, and of being treated as a man, I was little by little forgetting that I am a woman. My disguise seemed to be my proper apparel, and I could not remember ever having worn any other; I was forgetting that after all I was only an empty-headed young woman who had turned her needle into a sword and one of her skirts into a pair of breeches.

There are many men who are more of a woman than I. About all the femininity about me consists of my bosoms, a few softer contours, and more delicate hands. My skirts hang on my hips, but do not affect my spirit. It is often the case that the sex of the spirit is unlike that of the body, a contradiction which cannot fail to cause much trouble. As regards myself, for instance, had I not decided — foolishly as far as appearances went, but very wisely as a matter of fact — to give up the apparel of a sex to which I chance to belong, and only so far as physical conformation goes, I should have been very unhappy. I am fond of

horses, arms, and physical exercises; I like to climb and run at will like a boy; it bores me to death to sit still, my feet close together, elbows kept close to the side, to look down modestly, to speak in a flute-like, honeyed voice, and to pass a bit of wool ten million times through the holes of a piece of embroidery canvas. I am not in the least fond of obeying, and the words I utter most frequently are, "I will this or that."

Under my smooth brow and my silken hair stir strong and manly thoughts. All the finicky nonsense which usually delights women has never made much impression upon me, and like Achilles disguised as a girl, I would willingly throw aside the mirror for the sword. The only thing I like in women is their beauty. In spite of the inconveniences which result from it, I would not willingly give up my shape, ill assorted though it is to the mind it contains.

An intrigue of this sort has something new and piquant about it, and I would have greatly enjoyed it, had it not been taken seriously by poor Rosette. She took to loving me with all the artlessness and earnestness, with all the strength of her beautiful, kind soul; with a love that men do not understand and of which

they cannot have the faintest idea: delicately, ardently, as I should like to be loved, and as I shall love, if I ever realise my dream. What a splendid treasure is thus wasted! What white, transparent pearls, such as divers will never find in the jewel-case of the ocean! What soft breathings, what gentle sighs wafted through the air, which might have been gathered by pure and loving lips! Her passion might have made a young fellow so happy. So many handsome, charming, well-endowed, unfortunate men, brave and clever, have in vain prayed on their knees to insensible and cold idols! So many tender and kind souls have cast themselves in despair into the arms of courtesans, or have silently died out like lamps in a tomb, who might have been saved from debauch and death by true love! How strange is human destiny, and how sarcastic is chance! What so many others had ardently desired had come to me who did not and could not care for it. A capricious girl takes it into her head to travel in male apparel to find out something about her future lovers. She sleeps in an inn with a good brother who takes her by the hand to his sister; and the latter immediately falls passionately in love with her, like a cat, like a dove, like whatever there is of passionate and languorous in

the world. It is quite plain that if I had been a young man, and all this might have been of some use to me, things would have been quite different, and the lady would have taken a hearty dislike to me. Fortune is rather fond of presenting wooden-legged men with slippers and giving pairs of gloves to those who have no hands. A legacy which would have enabled you to live in comfort usually comes to you on the day of your death.

I occasionally went — not as often as she would have liked — to pay a visit to Rosette in her bedroom. Although she usually received only when dressed, nevertheless in my case she overlooked that point. She would have overlooked a good many other things had I chosen; but, as the proverb says, "The handsomest girl can give only what she has," and what I had could not have been of much use to Rosette.

She would hold out her little hand to me to kiss. I confess that I took a certain pleasure in kissing it, for it is a very smooth, white, exquisitely perfumed hand, and with a feeling of warm, fresh softness. I felt it quiver and contract under my lips, the pressure of which I slyly prolonged. Then Rosette, much moved and with a beseeching look, would turn upon me her

great eyes filled with voluptuousness and aglow with a moist, transparent light, and let fall upon the pillow her pretty head, which she had raised a little to receive me.

I could see her troubled bosom flutter under the sheet, and her whole body strangely agitated. Certainly any one capable of daring might have dared much; she would have been grateful for his boldness, and would have been satisfied to skip some chapters of the novel.

I would remain there an hour or two with her, still holding her hand, which I placed upon the coverlet. We talked delightfully and at much length, for although Rosette was greatly preoccupied by her love, she felt herself too sure of success not to preserve almost all her freedom of mind and her playfulness. From time to time only did her passion cast over her gaiety a transparent veil of gentle melancholy which rendered it still more piquant.

And, in fact, it would have been incredible that a young fellow starting in the world — and that is what I seemed to be — should not consider himself lucky at having such a fortunate chance, and should not profit to the utmost by it. For Rosette indeed was not one

who was likely to meet with great coldness, and knowing no more than she did concerning me, she reckoned on her charms and on my youth, even if love were to be lacking on my part.

However, as this situation was being unnaturally prolonged, she became somewhat uneasy, and the increase of flattering phrases and of fine protestations I indulged in scarce sufficed to restore to her her former sense of security. Two things amazed her in me, and she remarked them as contradictions which she could not reconcile, — the warmth of my speech and the coolness of my conduct.

Better than any one, my dear Graciosa, you know that my friendship has all the characteristics of the passion of love. It is sudden, ardent, quick, exclusive; it has of love even its jealousy; and I felt for Rosette a friendship almost like that which I bear to you. She might easily have been deceived with even less, and she was the more thoroughly deceived that the clothes I wore scarcely permitted her entertaining any other idea.

As I have not yet loved any man, the excess of my tenderness has, in a way, flowed over into my friendships with girls and young women. These have been

marked by the same violence and the same enthusiasm which characterise everything I do, it being impossible for me to be moderate in anything, and especially in matters of the heart. For me there are but two classes of people, — those I adore and those I execrate. The others are to me as if they were not, and I would ride over them as I would ride on the highroad. In my mind there is no difference between them and paving-stones and posts.

I am naturally expansive, and I have most caressing manners. Sometimes — forgetting the consequences of such demonstrations — I would, while walking with Rosette, pass my arm around her waist, as I used to do when you and I strolled together down that solitary walk at the end of uncle's garden ; or else, bending over the back of her arm-chair while she was embroidering, I would curl on my fingers the stray hairs which played upon her round, plump neck, or I would smooth with my hand her beautiful locks drawn close by the comb and make them shine again, or I would indulge in some of those fond ways which you know to be habitual with me when I am with my dear friends.

She had no thought of ascribing those caresses to mere friendship, — since friendship, as usually under-

stood, does not go so far; but seeing that I went no farther, she was inwardly astonished and knew not what to think. She came to the conclusion that my reserve was due to overmuch timidity on my part, arising from my extreme youth and from the want of habit of love affairs, and that I needed to be encouraged by all sorts of advances and kindnesses.

Consequently she took care to manage many opportunities for *tête-à-têtes* in places likely to embolden me by their solitude and their distance from any sound and any importunate intruder. She made me take several walks through the woods to see whether the voluptuous reverie and the love desires inspired in sentimental souls by the thick and propitious shade of the forest might not be turned to account.

One day, after having made me wander for a long time through a very picturesque park which extends far at the back of the mansion, and of which I knew but the portion near the buildings, she led me by a narrow path capriciously twisting about and bordered with elders and hazels, to a rustic hut, a sort of charcoal-burner's hut, built of logs placed crosswise, with a thatched roof and a door roughly made out of five or six planks scarcely planed, the interstices between which

were filled with mosses and wild plants. Close by, between the moss-grown roots of the great, silvery-barked ash-trees, spotted here and there with black stains, flowed an abundant spring which, a few paces farther, rippled down two marble steps into a basin filled with cress greener than emerald. In the places where the cress did not grow there was sand, fine and white as snow. The water was crystal clear, and ice cold. Issuing, as it did, suddenly from the ground, and never touched by the faintest sunbeam under the impenetrable shade, it had not time to grow warm or muddy. In spite of its crudity I like spring water, and seeing this was limpid, I could not resist the desire to drink. I bent down and dipped some up repeatedly in the hollow of my hand, having no other vessel at my disposal.

Rosette expressed a desire to appease her thirst with some of this water, and begged me to bring her a few drops, — not daring, she said, to bend as low as was necessary in order to reach it. I plunged my two hands, clasped as closely as possible, into the clear fountain. Then I raised them like a cup to Rosette's lips and held them thus until she drained the water they contained; this did not take long, for there was very little, and the little there was dripped between my fingers,

close though I held them. We thus made a very pretty group, and it is much to be regretted that a sculptor was not there to make a sketch of it.

When she had almost finished, my hand being near her lips, she could not help kissing it, in such a way, however, that I might readily have believed that it was merely an aspiration intended to exhaust the last watery pearl lying in the palm of my hand; but I was not to be deceived, and the lovely blush which suddenly covered her face sufficiently denounced her.

She took my arm again, and we walked towards the hut. My beauty kept as close to me as she could, and bent as she spoke so that her bosom pressed upon my sleeve, — an extremely clever attitude, capable of troubling any one but me. I could plainly feel the firm, clean outline and the gentle warmth of her breast. Moreover, I could notice its precipitate beating, which, were it affected or true, was none the less flattering and engaging.

We thus reached the door of the hut, which I opened with a kick. I certainly did not expect the sight which I beheld. I had looked to find a cabin hung with reeds, with a mat on the ground and a few stools to rest upon. Far from it. It was a boudoir furnished

with the greatest elegance imaginable. The panels above the doors and mirrors represented the most sensuous scenes of the "Metamorphoses" of Ovid,—Salmacis and Hermaphrodite, Venus and Adonis, Apollo and Daphne, and other mythological love affairs, painted in a pale-lilac monochrome. The bays were covered with Burgundy roses and little daisies, the hearts of which alone, through a refinement of luxury, were gilded, while the leaves were silvered. A silver braid bordered all the furniture, and was also used to loop up hangings of the loveliest blue that can be imagined, marvellously adapted to show to the best advantage the whiteness and brilliancy of the skin. Innumerable charming trifles were placed on the mantelpiece, the tables, and the shelves. There were any number of cosy chairs, low seats, and sofas, which sufficiently proved that this retreat was not destined to very austere occupations, and that assuredly it was not intended for maceration. A handsome *rocaille* clock, placed upon a richly inlaid pedestal, stood beside a tall Venetian mirror, in which it was repeated with strange brilliancy and reflections. It had stopped, as if it were a superfluous matter to mark the hours in a place intended to make you forget them.

I told Rosette that this refinement of luxury pleased me, and that I considered it in very good taste to hide the greatest splendour under an appearance of the greatest simplicity, just as I strongly approved of a woman having embroidered petticoats and a chemise edged with costly lace under an ordinary linen dress; it was a delicate attention for the lover she had or might have, which he could not be sufficiently grateful for,—and that it was undoubtedly better to put a diamond inside a nut than a nut inside a gold box. Rosette, to prove to me that she was of my opinion, drew up her dress and showed me the edge of her petticoat richly embroidered with great flowers and foliage. It depended upon me alone to be admitted to the secret of the greater hidden magnificence, but I did not ask to see whether the beauty of the chemise corresponded to that of the petticoat. Probably it was just as luxurious. Rosette let fall her dress, sorry not to have shown more. Yet this exhibition had quite served her purpose of displaying an ankle admirably turned and giving the highest opinion of the rest of the limb. That limb, which she extended in order to spread out her skirt better, was really marvellously fine and beautiful in its pearl-gray silk stocking, close fitting and drawn tight; and the little high-heeled

slipper adorned with a bow of ribbon, with which it was shod, resembled the glass slipper worn by Cinderella. I paid her the most sincere compliments on this, and told her that I scarcely knew of any handsomer legs or smaller feet, and I did not believe it was possible for a woman to have them more shapely. Whereunto she replied, with a most charming and sweet frankness, "You are quite right."

Then she went to a panel in the wall, drew out one or two flagons of liquor and some plates of sweets and cakes; placed these on a small round table, and came to sit down by me in a rather narrrow arm-chair, so that I was obliged, in order not to be too much crowded, to put my arm around her waist. As she had both hands free, and as I could actually use the left hand only, she herself filled my glass and put fruits and sweets upon my plate. Soon, indeed, seeing that I did not manage very skilfully, she said to me, "Come, leave it alone! I shall feed you, child that you are, since you cannot manage it for yourself." So she put the pieces to my lips and forced me to swallow them quicker than I would, pushing them in with her pretty fingers exactly as is done with birds that are fed; whereat she laughed greatly. I could not, of course, avoid returning to her

fingers the kiss that she had but a short time before bestowed on the palms of my hands; and as if to prevent me, but in reality in order to afford me an opportunity of kissing more ardently, she tapped my mouth two or three times with the back of her hand. She had drunk two or three glasses of Barbadoes cream, and a glass of Canary wine,—not a very great deal certainly, but sufficient to excite a woman accustomed to drink water scarcely reddened by wine. Rosette let herself fall back and leaned most amorously upon my arm. She had thrown off her cape, and I could see the upper part of her bosom, which showed more strikingly owing to her attitude. It was most ravishingly delicate and transparent in tone, while the form was of marvellous purity and solidity. I looked at it for some time with indefinable emotion and pleasure, and it occurred to me that men were favoured more than we are in love matters, for we give them the most charming treasures to possess, while they have nothing similar to offer us. What a delight it must be to explore with one's lips a fine smooth skin, and rounded contours which seem to offer themselves to kisses and to provoke them! The satin-like flesh and the curves which run one into another, the silky locks so soft to

the touch, — what inexhaustible subjects of delicate voluptuousness, which we do not have with men. Our caresses can scarce be but passive; and yet there is more pleasure in giving than in receiving.

These remarks I should certainly not have made last year, and I should have looked upon all the bosoms and all the shoulders in the world without troubling to know whether they were shapely or otherwise; but since I have thrown off the apparel of my own sex and lived with men, a hitherto unknown feeling has developed in me, a feeling for beauty. Women usually lack it — I do not know why, for at first sight it would seem as if they were better able to judge of beauty than men; but as it is they who possess it, and as the knowledge of one's self is the most difficult of all, it is not surprising that they do not understand it at all. Usually, if a woman thinks another woman pretty, you may be sure that the latter is very ugly, and that not a single man would be attracted by her. On the other hand, all the women whose beauty and grace are praised by men are unanimously considered abominable and affected by the whole petticoated flock, which utters endless cries and clamours against them. If I were what I seem to be I would ask for no better

guide in my choice, and the disapproval of women would be to me a sufficient certificate of beauty.

Now I love and understand beauty. The clothes I wear have separated me from my sex and taken away the feeling of rivalry, and I am able to judge better than any one else. I am no longer a woman, but I am not yet a man, and desire will not blind me to the extent of mistaking lay figures for idols. I look on coolly and without prejudice either for or against, and my position is as thoroughly disinterested as it is possible to be. The length and delicacy of the eyelashes, the transparency of the temples, the limpidity of the eye, the shell-like form of the ear, the tone and quality of the hair, the aristocratic shape of the feet and hands, the more or less fine ankles, knees, and wrists, — a thousand things which I had not previously noticed and which constitute true beauty and prove high breeding now guide me in my appreciation and scarcely allow me to make a mistake. I believe that one might blindly accept a woman of whom I should have said, "Indeed, she is not so bad."

By a very natural consequence I understand pictures much better than I did before, and although I have but a very superficial acquaintance with the masters, it

would be difficult to make me accept a poor painting as a good one. I find a deep and singular charm in this study; for like everything else in the world, physical beauty requires to be studied, and does not allow itself to be grasped at once.

But let us go back to Rosette. From that subject to her the transition is not difficult. The two ideas are connected. As I said, my beauty had fallen back on my arm, and her head was leaning on my shoulder. Emotion flushed her lovely cheeks with a tender rose tint which the dark spot of a patch most coquettishly placed brought out admirably. Her teeth shone through her smile like raindrops within a poppy, and her eyelashes, half closed, still further increased the moist brilliancy of her great eyes. A sunbeam shone with innumerable metallic reflections upon her soft and silky hair, a few curls of which had escaped and fell in long love-locks down her round, plump neck, the warm whiteness of which they brought out. A few detached hairs, more rebellious than the others, were apart from the mass and curled in capricious spirals; gilded with strange reflections and flushed by the light they showed all the colours of the prism, and looked like those golden haloes which surround the heads of virgins in

old pictures. We were both silent, and I amused myself by tracing under the pearly transparency of her temples the little azure veins, and the soft, delicate diminution of the down at the extremity of her eyebrows. My beauty seemed to be sunk in thought and lost in dreams of infinite pleasure. Her arms hung down with the curves and softness of a scarf that has been untied; her head fell back more and more, as if the muscles that sustained it had been cut or were too weak to sustain it. She had drawn her two little feet under her petticoats, and she had succeeded in snuggling up completely within the angle of the arm-chair I occupied, so that although the chair was narrow, there still remained a great empty space on the other side.

Her body, yielding and supple, clung close to mine like wax, and followed the lines of mine as closely as possible. Water even could not have insinuated itself more exactly into all the sinuosities of the line. Thus close pressed to my side, she looked like that second line which painters add to their drawings on the shadow side so as to render it richer and stronger. Only a woman in love can thus undulate and embrace; ivy and willows do not approach her.

I felt the soft warmth of her body through her dress and mine; a thousand magnetic currents radiated from her. Her whole being seemed to have passed into me and to have abandoned her completely. Every moment she languished and fainted and yielded more and more. Slight pearly drops showed upon her lustrous brow, her eyes became moist, and two or three times she made as though she would raise her hands to conceal them, but when half-way they fell weary into her lap and she could not manage it. A great tear shone upon her eyelid and rolled over her burning cheek, upon which it was soon dried up.

My situation was becoming very embarrassing and exceedingly ridiculous. I felt that I must seem enormously stupid to her, and that was particularly disagreeable to me, although it was not in my power to seem anything else. Bold, uncompromising ways were forbidden to me, and yet they were the only ones suitable to the situation. I was too sure not to meet with resistance to venture upon them, and indeed, I did not know which way to turn. To chatter love sayings and pay her compliments would have been all very fine at first, but nothing could have been more inappropriate at the point we had now reached. To get

up and go would have been most impolite; and, besides, I will not wager that Rosette would not have played the part of Potiphar's wife and held me back by the corner of my cloak. I should have had no virtuous motive to explain my resistance. Besides, — I own it to my shame, — this scene, equivocal though its character was, did not lack a certain charm which had more power over me than was right. Her ardent desire heated me with its flame, and I was sorry to be unable to satisfy it. I even wished I were a man, as I appeared to be, so as to crown her love, and I greatly regretted that Rosette should be mistaken. My breath came fast, I felt myself blushing, and I was scarcely less troubled than my poor love. The thought of the similarity of sex was gradually fading away, leaving only a vague notion of pleasure. My glance became moist, my lips trembled, and had Rosette been a man instead of being what she was, she could certainly have had me without difficulty.

At last, unable to stand it longer, she rose abruptly with a sort of spasmodic movement, and began to walk up and down the room rapidly. Then she stopped before the mirror to rearrange some locks of hair which had gone astray.

While she was thus walking about I looked very much like a fool, and scarcely knew which way to turn.

She stopped before me and seemed to reflect.

She thought outrageous shyness kept me back, and that I was more of a schoolboy than she had first thought. Carried beyond herself and worked up to the highest degree of passionate desire, she determined to make a supreme effort and to stake her all, at the risk of losing the game.

She came to me, and quicker than lightning sat down upon my knees, threw her arms around my neck, clasped her hands behind my head, while her lips were glued to mine with mad violence. I felt her breasts, half bare and excited, heaving against my bosom, while her clasped fingers clutched my hair. A thrill went through me and my bosoms swelled. Rosette did not let go of my mouth. Her lips sucked in my lips, her teeth touched my teeth, our breaths mingled. I drew back for a moment, and two or three times turned away my head to avoid her kisses, but an invincible attraction made me turn again, and I kissed her in return almost as ardently as she had kissed me. I do not quite know what would have happened, if a loud bark-

ing had not just then been heard outside the door, with a sound of claws scratching. The door gave way and a handsome white greyhound sprang into the hut, yelping and jumping about.

Rosette rose suddenly, and with one spring was at the other side of the room. The handsome white greyhound leaped around her joyously and delightedly, and tried to reach her hands to lick them. She was so much agitated that she had great difficulty in readjusting her mantle on her shoulders. The greyhound was the favourite dog of her brother Alcibiades. It never left him, and when you saw the hound, you might be sure the master was not far off. This is what had so troubled poor Rosette. Indeed, Alcibiades himself came in a minute later, booted and spurred, whip in hand.

"Ah, there you are!" said he. "I have been looking for you for an hour past, and I certainly should not have found you had not my good greyhound Snug unearthed you in your hiding-place." And he cast at his sister a glance half serious, half playful, which made her blush up to the eyes.

"You had apparently some very difficult subjects to discuss, since you withdrew into so deep a solitude.

No doubt you were talking of theology and the double nature of the soul."

"Oh, dear, no! Our occupation was by no means so sublime. We were eating cake and talking fashions — that is all."

"I do not believe it. You appear to me to have been deeply sunk in some sentimental dissertation. But by way of changing your vaporous conversation, I think it would not be bad for you to come and have a ride. I have a new mare that I want to try. You shall ride her too, Theodore, and we shall see what we can make of her."

The three of us went out together, I taking his arm and Rosette taking mine. The expression of our respective faces was singularly different. Alcibiades was thoughtful, I was quite at my ease, and Rosette was exceedingly put out.

Alcibiades had arrived very opportunely for me, but very inopportunely for Rosette, who thus lost all the fruit of her clever advances and her ingenious tactics. The whole business would have to be gone over again. Had it lasted another quarter of an hour, the devil take me if I know what would have been the outcome of our adventure. I do not see what it could have been.

Perhaps it would have been better that Alcibiades should not have interrupted us exactly at the critical moment, like a god out of his machine. There would have had to be a finish of some sort. During that scene I was two or three times on the point of confessing to Rosette who I really was; but the fear of passing for an adventuress and of seeing my secret divulged, kept back the words as they were ready to leave my lips.

Such a state of things could not possibly last. The only way of cutting short this hopeless intrigue was to leave. And so at dinner I officially announced that I would set out the very next day. Rosette, who was seated beside me, nearly fainted on hearing this piece of news; her beautiful face turned suddenly pale; she cast on me a glance of pain and reproach which moved and troubled me almost as much as she was moved and troubled. The aunt held up her old, wrinkled hands with a gesture of painful surprise, and in her thin and trembling voice, which was more unsteady even than usual, she said to me, "Oh, Mr. Theodore, are you leaving us so suddenly? That is not right. Yesterday you did not seem in the least prepared to go. The postman has not come, so you have received no letters,

and you have no reason. You had promised to stay another fortnight, and now you take back your word! You really have not the right to do so. A gift should never be taken back. You can see for yourself how Rosette is looking at you, and how she is annoyed with you. I warn you that I shall be at least as much annoyed and that I shall show you just as troubled a face, — and a face of sixty-eight is much more terrible than one of twenty-three. See what you are exposing yourself to voluntarily! — the anger of the aunt and that of the niece; and all for some strange caprice which has suddenly occurred to you between the fruit and the cheese."

Alcibiades swore, bringing his fist heavily down upon the table, that he would barricade the gates of the mansion and hamstring my horse rather than let me go.

Rosette cast on me another glance, so sad and beseeching that I should have had to be as savage as a tiger that has been starving for a week to resist it.

I did not resist it, and although it greatly annoyed me, I solemnly promised to remain. Dear Rosette would willingly have thrown herself into my arms and kissed me on the mouth for my kindness. Alcibiades

seized my hand in his big hand and shook it so violently that he nearly dislocated my shoulder, made my rings oval instead of round, as they were, and cut three of my fingers rather badly. The old lady, by way of showing her joy, sniffed up an immense pinch of snuff.

Rosette, nevertheless, did not wholly regain her cheerfulness. The idea that I might go away and that I wished to do so, an idea which had not yet clearly occurred to her, threw her into a deep reverie. The colour, which the announcement of my departure had driven from her cheeks, did not return as bright as before; her face remained pale and her heart uneasy. My conduct towards her surprised her more and more. After the marked advances which she had made to me, she could not understand the motives which caused me to be so reserved in my relations with her. What she wished was to bring on before my departure an absolute, decisive engagement, not doubting that thereafter it would be exceedingly easy for her to detain me as long as she wished.

She was right in this, and had I not been a woman, her calculations would have been quite correct; for whatever may have been said of the satiety of pleasure and of the disgust which usually follows passion, any

man who has anything of a heart and who is not wretchedly and hopelessly *blasé* feels his love increased by his happiness, and very often the best way to retain a lover ready to leave is to give one's self up to him without reserve.

Rosette intended to bring me to a decisive point before my departure, knowing how difficult it is to renew a *liaison* at the very point at which it has been dropped; and besides, being in no wise sure of ever meeting me again under equally favourable circumstances, she neglected none of the occasions which might occur to put me into a position to declare myself openly and to abandon the evasive offishness behind which I intrenched myself. And, for my part, I had made up my mind to avoid any kind of encounter similar to that in the rustic pavilion; while I could not, however, without appearing ridiculous, affect too much coldness toward Rosette and introduce into our relations a little girl's prudishness, I did not quite know how to behave myself, and I always tried that there should be a third party with us. Rosette, on the contrary, did her utmost to be alone with me, and she succeeded pretty often, the mansion being far from town and not much frequented by the nobility of the

neighbourhood. My secret resistance stunned and surprised her. At times she doubted and hesitated as to the power of her charms, and seeing herself so little loved, she was occasionally not far from believing that she was ugly. Then she increased her attentions and her coquetry, and although, being in mourning, she could not make use of all the resources of dress, she nevertheless knew how to adorn and vary her toilet so as to be every day two or three times more charming than before, — which is saying not a little. She tried everything. She was playful, melancholy, tender, passionate, eager, coquettish, affected even. She put on, one after another, all those adorable masks which become women so thoroughly that one at last knows not whether they are masks or their real faces. She assumed successively eight or ten different individualities, contrasting with each other, to see which would please me most, so that she might adopt it. In her own person she laid before me a complete seraglio, from which I had only to make a choice; but she succeeded in nothing, as will be easily understood. The ill success of all her stratagems caused her to fall into deep amazement. As a matter of fact, she would have turned the head

of Nestor and melted the ice of chaste Hippolytus himself, and in outward appearance I am anything but Nestor or Hippolytus. I am young; I have a proud, firm mien, and a bold way of talking — except in a *tête-à-tête*.

She must have thought that all the witches of Thrace and Thessaly had cast their spells upon me, or that, at the very least, I was not much of a man, and she must have had a very poor opinion of my virility — which, as a matter of fact, does not amount to much. However, it would seem that this idea did not occur to her, and that she attributed my singular reserve merely to my want of love for her.

The days went by and her affairs did not prosper. She was visibly affected by this. An expression of sad uneasiness had replaced the ever fresh smile upon her lips. The corners of her mouth, so charmingly turned up, now markedly turned down, formed a firm, serious line. A few little veins stood out more plainly upon her eyelids; her cheeks, but recently so peach-like, had preserved but their imperceptible bloom. Often from my window I could see her crossing the flower garden in her morning wrapper. She walked scarcely lifting her feet, as if she were gliding along,

her two arms languidly crossed upon her bosom, her head bent, more bowed than a willow branch that dips in the wave, with something about her broken down and undulating, like a drapery that is too long and the end of which trails on the earth. At such times she looked like one of those women of antiquity who were a prey to the wrath of Venus, and whom the pitiless goddess pursued. It is thus that I imagine Psyche looked when she had lost Cupid.

On the days when she did not make an effort to overcome my coldness and my hesitation, her love had a simple and primitive way about it that was charming. It was a silent, trustful yielding of herself, a chaste facility of caresses, an inexhaustible openness and fulness of heart; all the treasures of a fine nature unreservedly brought forth. She had none of those mean little ways that are to be met with in almost all women, even the most richly endowed. She sought no disguise, but calmly let me see the whole extent of her passion. Her self-love did not for an instant revolt at my not responding to her many advances, for pride leaves the heart on the day that love enters it; and if ever any one was truly loved, I was by Rosette. She suffered, but

without complaining, without bitterness, and attributed to herself alone the ill success of her attempts. Meanwhile her pallor augmented daily. On the battlefield of her cheeks the lilies had fought with the roses a great fight, in which the roses had been finally routed. I grieved at this, but naturally I was the least able to help it. The more gently and the more affectionately I spoke to her, the more caressing were my ways, the more deeply did I drive into her heart the barbed arrow of impossible love. If I sought to console her to-day, I prepared a much greater desire for the future. My remedies poisoned the wound while appearing to soothe it. I repented of all the pleasant things I had ever said to her, and I wished, because of the great friendship I felt for her, I could find means to be hated by her. Disinterestedness could not have been carried farther, for assuredly I should have been very sorry to have been so hated, though it would have been better.

Twice or thrice I tried to speak harshly to her. I quickly came back to soft things, however, for I dread her smile less than I do her tears. On those occasions, although the loyalty of my intention fully absolves me in my conscience, I am more touched

than I should be, and I feel something which is not far from remorse. A tear can scarcely be dried save by a kiss, and you cannot decently leave it to be done by a handkerchief, were it of the finest cambric in the world. I undo what I have done; the tear is quickly forgotten, quicker than is the kiss; and the consequence to me is always an increase of embarrassment.

Rosette, who sees that I am going to escape from her, clings persistently and wretchedly to the remains of her hope, and my position becomes more and more complicated. Several times, although less violently, I have felt the strange sensation that came over me in the little hermitage, — an inexplicable emotion, caused by the ardent caresses of my loving beauty. Often when seated near Rosette, her hand in mine, listening to her as she softly coos in her speech, I imagine that I am the man she believes me to be, and that if I do not respond to her love, it is due to pure cruelty on my part.

One evening, I know not by what chance, I happened to be alone in the green room with the old lady. She was working at some embroidery; for in spite of her sixty-eight years, she is never idle, desiring, she

says, to finish, before she dies, a piece of work which she has begun and which she has been at for a very long time. Feeling somewhat tired, she laid down her embroidery and leaned back in her arm-chair. She looked at me very attentively, and her grey eyes sparkled through her glasses with strange vivacity. She passed her thin hand two or three times over her wrinkled brow, and seemed to be thinking deeply. The remembrance of the days that were no more and that she regretted, gave her face a melancholy expression of tenderness. I was silent, fearing to trouble her thoughts, and the silence lasted for a few minutes. She broke it at last.

"You have the very eyes of my dear Henry, — the same moist, bright look, the same carriage of the head, the same gentle and proud mien. One could swear you are he. You cannot imagine how close is the resemblance, Mr. Theodore. When I see you I cannot believe that Henry is dead. I only think that he has been on a long voyage, and that now he has at last returned. You have given me much pleasure, and much pain, Theodore, — pleasure by recalling my poor Henry to me, and pain by showing me how great is the loss I have suffered. Sometimes I have mis-

taken you for his ghost. I cannot get reconciled to the idea that you are going to leave us. It seems to me that I am losing my Henry once again."

I told her that if it were possible for me to remain longer, I should do so with pleasure, but that my stay had already been prolonged far beyond proper bounds. Then besides, I proposed to return, for I had much too pleasant remembrances of the mansion to forget it so quickly.

"Sorry as I am that you are leaving us, Mr. Theodore," she went on, following her own train of thought, "there is some one here who will be still more sorry than I. You know very well whom I mean without my naming names. I do not know what we shall do with Rosette when you shall have gone. This old home is very sad. Alcibiades is always out hunting, and for a young woman like herself the society of a poor invalid like me is not very cheerful."

"If any one is to feel any regret, madam, it is neither you nor Rosette, but I. You lose little, I much. You will easily find more agreeable company than mine, and I doubt whether I can ever make up for yours and Rosette's."

"I will not quarrel with your modesty, my dear sir, but I know how things are. It is likely that we shall not see Mistress Rosette bright again for a long time, for it is you who make her smile or weep as you please. Her mourning is drawing to an end, and it would be most regrettable that she should put away her gaiety with her last black dress. It would set a very bad example and be quite contrary to ordinary laws. Now that is a thing which you can prevent without taking too much trouble, and which no doubt you will prevent," said the old lady, dwelling markedly upon the last words.

"Certainly I shall do my best to have your dear niece preserve her gay temper, since you imagine that I have so much influence over her; and yet I scarcely see how I am to set about it."

"Oh, indeed! You scarcely see how you can set about it? What is the good of those fine eyes of yours? I did not know that you were so short-sighted. Rosette is free. She has eighty thousand a year entirely in her own right, and women twice as plain as she are thought very pretty. You are young, handsome, and I fancy, unmarried. The matter seems to me the simplest in the world, unless you feel an in-

surmountable dislike to Rosette — which it is difficult to believe."

"Which is not, and cannot be; for her heart is as beautiful as her form. She is one of those women who might be ugly without its being perceived, and without any one desiring that she should be otherwise. She might be ugly with impunity, and she is charming."

"You are doubly right. I do not doubt what you say, but she has taken the wiser part. As far as she is concerned, I would willingly answer for it that there are a thousand persons whom she hates more than you, and that if she were asked several times she would perhaps end by confessing that you are not wholly indifferent to her. You wear on your finger a ring which would fit her perfectly, for your hand is almost as small as hers, and I am almost sure that she would accept it with pleasure."

The good lady stopped for a moment to see the effect her words would have upon me, and I know not if she was satisfied with the expression of my face. I was cruelly embarrassed, and I knew not what to answer. From the very beginning of the conversation I had seen whither tended all her insinuations,

and although I myself expected what she had just said, it left me very much surprised and speechless. I could only refuse, but what satisfactory motives could I give for such a refusal? I had none, save that I am a woman. Undoubtedly it is an excellent reason, but it happened to be the only one which I did not wish to give. I could not shelter myself behind fierce and ridiculous parents; every parent in the world would have welcomed such a match with delight. Even had Rosette not been what she is — good and beautiful and well born — her eighty thousand a year would have removed all obstacles. To say that I did not love her would have been neither true nor honest, for I really loved her deeply and more than any woman loves another woman. I was too young to pretend to be engaged to some one else. So the best thing I could think of was to let it be understood that, being the youngest of the family, the interests of our house required me to enter the Order of Malta and did not permit me to think of marriage; a fact which caused me the deepest possible grief since I had seen Rosette. My reply was not worth a damn, and I was thoroughly aware of it. The old lady was not deceived by it and did not consider it final. She concluded that I had

spoken thus simply to have time to reflect and consult my parents; in point of fact, the match was so advantageous and unhoped for, so far as I was concerned, that it was impossible I should refuse it, even if I had not loved Rosette, or loved her but little. It was a piece of luck not to be neglected.

I do not know whether the aunt made these overtures to me at the suggestion of her niece, though I incline to believe that Rosette had nothing to do with them. She loved me too artlessly and too ardently to think of anything else than possessing me at once, and marriage would assuredly have been the last of the means she would have employed.

The old dowager, who had not failed to notice our intimacy — which no doubt she believed much greater than it really was — had devised that plan in her own mind to keep me beside her and to replace, as far as possible, her own dear son Henry, killed in battle, to whom she thought I was so strangely like. She had turned to account our being alone together to have an explanation with me. I saw by her face that she did not consider herself defeated, but that she proposed to renew the subject — to my great contrariety.

Rosette, on her part, made that very night a last

attempt, which had such serious results that I must give you a separate description of it, and which I cannot tell you of in this letter, already unconscionably long. You shall see to what strange adventures I was predestined, and how Heaven had cut me out beforehand for the heroine of a novel. I confess, I do not quite see the morality which may be drawn from the whole business. But human lives are not like fables; every page does not have at the end of it a rimed maxim. Very often the feeling of life is that it is not death — that is all.

Farewell, my dear. I kiss your lovely eyes. You shall receive very speedily a continuation of my triumphant biography.

XIII

THEODORE, — Rosalind, — for I know not by what name to call you, — I saw you but a moment since, and now I am writing to you. Would I knew your woman's name! It must be sweet as honey and flit on the lips more suave and more harmonious than verse. I should never have dared to tell you that, and yet I should have died had I not said it. What I have suffered, no one knows or can know. Even I can give but a faint idea of it. Words cannot express this anguish. It would be thought I had twisted my sentences for the pleasure of twisting them, that I had wearied myself to say new and singular things and to fall into the most extravagant exaggeration, when in reality I should have depicted what I felt with images scarcely adequate. O Rosalind! I love you, I adore you. Why are there no stronger expressions? I have never loved or worshipped any one but you. I am prostrate before you. I am as naught in your presence, and I wish I could compel all creation to bend the knee before my idol. To me you are more than all nature, more than heaven,

more than God. It often seems strange to me that God does not come down from heaven to be your slave. Where you are not is a desert, is death, is darkness. You alone people the world for me. You are life and the sun. You are everything to me. When you smile, it is day; when you are sad it is night. The spheres follow the movement of your frame, and the celestial harmonies are directed by you, O my dearest queen, O my fair dream come true! You are clothed in splendour, and you float ever in a radiant vapour.

I have known you scarce three months, but I have loved you for a long time. Before I saw you I languished with love for you. I called you and sought you, and despaired because I did not meet you on my way, knowing that never could I love any other woman. How often have you appeared to me! At the window of a mysterious mansion, leaning dreamily on the balcony and casting to the winds the petals of a flower, or else a spirited horsewoman on your Turkish steed whiter than snow, traversing at a gallop the dark lanes of the forest. You had those same proud, gentle eyes, the same diaphanous hands, the same beautiful waving hair, and that faint smile so terribly disdainful. Only you were less fair; for the most

ardent, the maddest imagination, that of a painter or poet, cannot reach that sublime poetry of reality. There is in you an inexhaustible well of graces, an ever springing fountain of mysterious seduction. You are a jewel-case ever open, filled with the most precious pearls, and in your most unconscious gestures, in your most careless phrases, you cast constantly with royal profusion inestimable treasures of beauty. If the swift undulations of a contour, if the soft outlines of an attitude could be fixed and preserved in a mirror, the mirrors before which you have passed would make men despise the divinest paintings of Raphael and look upon them as no better than tavern signs. Every gesture, every pose of your head, every different aspect of your body, is engraved on my soul with a diamond point, and nothing on earth can efface the deep imprint. I know the spot where fell the shadow, and that where shone the light; the surface on which gleamed the sunbeams and the place where the passing reflection melted into the softest tints of the neck and the cheek. I could draw your picture in your absence. The thought of you is always present with me.

When yet a child I would spend whole hours standing before the old pictures of the masters, eagerly

searching their dark depths. I gazed upon those marvellous figures of saints and goddesses, whose ivory or wax-white flesh stood out so marvellously against the dark background, blackened by the decomposition of the pigments. I admired the simplicity and magnificence of their mien, the strange gracefulness of their hands and feet, the proud and well marked character of their features, at once so delicate and firm, the grand effect of the draperies fluttering around their divine shapes, the purple folds of which seemed to stretch like lips to embrace these beautiful bodies. By dint of obstinately making my gaze penetrate the veil of smoke thickened by the centuries, my sight grew confused, the contours lost their precision, and a sort of motionless, dead life filled all these phantasms of vanished beauties; and I came to believe that these faces vaguely resembled the fair unknown whom I worshipped within my heart. I sighed as I thought that she whom I wished to love was one of these perhaps, and it affected me to the point of making me shed tears and making me greatly wroth with myself at not having been born in the sixteenth century when all these beauties had lived. I thought it unpardonably stupid and senseless on my part. As I grew older the

beloved phantom haunted me more closely. I saw it ever between me and the women I had for mistresses, smiling with ironical look and jeering at their human loveliness with all the perfection of its divine beauty. It caused me to think women ugly who were really charming and made to make happy whoever was not in love with that adorable shade whose beauty I believed not to exist and which was but a presentiment of yours. Oh, Rosalind, how unhappy I have been because of you before I knew you! Oh, Theodore, how unhappy I was on your account after I knew you! Were you but willing, you could open to me the paradise of my dreams. You stand on the threshold like a guardian angel, wrapped in its wings, and you have the golden key in your hands. Answer, Rosalind, answer! will you open it?

I wait but a word from you to live or to die. Will you speak it?

Are you Apollo driven from heaven, — or fair Aphrodite risen from the bosom of the sea? Where have you left your jewelled car drawn by four fairy horses? What have you done with your pearly shell and your dolphins with the azure tails? What amorous nymph has caused her beauty to melt in yours, O

fair young man, more charming than Cyparissus and Adonis, more adorable than all women?

But you are a woman. We are no longer in the time of the Metamorphoses. Adonis and Hermaphrodite are dead, and no man could attain to such a degree of beauty. For since the heroes and the gods have passed away, you women alone preserve in your marble bodies, as in a Greek temple, the precious gift of form anathematised by Christ, to show that heaven has nothing which earth need envy. You worthily represent the first divinity of the world, the purest symbolisation of the eternal essence — beauty.

As soon as I saw you, something was torn apart in me; a veil fell, a door was opened. I felt myself inwardly flooded with waves of light. I understood that my life was before me, and that I had at last reached the decisive turning. The obscure and dim parts of the half-radiant face which I tried to make out in the shadow were suddenly lighted up; the deeper tints which overspread the background were softly illumined; a tender rosy light fell upon the greenish ultramarine of the distance. The trees, which showed but as shapeless silhouettes, began to stand out more clearly; the dew-laden flowers shone like brilliant

spots in the dull verdure of the turf. I saw the bull-finch with his scarlet breast on the top of an elder branch, the little white rabbit with pink eyes and erect ears — which puts its head out between two blades of wild thyme — rubbing its nose with its paws, and the timid stag which comes to drink at the spring and reflect its antlers in the water. Since the morning when the sun of love rose upon my life, all is changed. Where trembled in the shade vague forms whose very uncertainty made them terrible or mysterious, stand out graceful groups of trees in bloom, hills circling like charming amphitheatres, silver palaces whose terraces are laden with vases and statues, and which plunge their feet into azure lakes and seem to float between two skies. What I took in the obscurity for a gigantic dragon whose wings were armed with claws and which crawled across the night upon its scaly paws, turns out to be a felucca with silken sails, with painted and gilded sweeps, full of women and musicians; and the frightful crab which I believed I saw wave above my head its claws and pincers, is but a fan-palm whose long and narrow leaves rustle in the night breeze. My chimeras and my horrors have vanished. I love.

Despairing of ever finding you, I charged my dreams with falsehood, I quarrelled madly with fate. I said to myself I was mad to seek for such beauty; and again that nature was very unfruitful and the Creator very unskilful, since neither could make real the simple thought in my heart. Prometheus had been filled with the noble pride of seeking to make a man and to rival God. I — I had created a woman, and I thought that, as a punishment for my boldness, an ever unsatisfied desire would gnaw my liver like another vulture. I expected to be chained with diamond fetters to a bare rock upon the shores of the wild ocean; but the lovely sea-nymphs with their long green hair, showing above the waves their white and pointed breasts, and displaying in the sunshine their bodies glistering like mother-of-pearl and dripping with the tears of the sea, would never come to lean upon the shore and talk to me and console me in my pain, as they do in the play by old Æschylus.

But it has not thus befallen me.

You came, — and then I had to reproach my imagination with its powerlessness. My torment was not that which I had feared, of being forever a prey to a vulture upon a sterile rock. I saw that indeed you

existed, that my presentiments had not been false on this point; but you came to me with the ambiguous and terrible beauty of the sphinx; like Isis, the terrible goddess, you were enveloped in a veil which I dared not lift lest I should be struck dead. If you could only know with what breathless, resistless attention, in spite of my careless appearance, I watched and followed even your least motions. Nothing escaped me. How ardently I gazed at the little which showed of your flesh, at the neck or the wrists, to try to make out your sex. Your hands became for me a subject of profound study, and I may say that I know their slightest sinuosities, their most imperceptible veins, their least dimples. Were you to conceal yourself from head to foot in the most impenetrable domino, I should recognise you if I saw only one of your fingers. I analysed the undulations of your walk, the way in which you stepped, the way you threw back your hair. I tried to surprise your secret in the habit of your body. I watched you especially in those hours of ease when the bones seem to have withdrawn from the frame and when the limbs sink and bend as if they were undone, to see if the feminine outlines would show more plainly in that forgetfulness and noncha-

lance. Never was any one gazed upon as ardently as you have been. I would lose myself for whole hours in that contemplation. Withdrawn to some corner of the drawing-room, in my hand a book that I read not, or concealed behind the curtain of my room when you were in your own and the blinds of your window were up, — then, penetrated to the full by the marvellous beauty that spreads around you and makes, as it were, an atmosphere of light around you, I would say to myself, "Unquestionably she is a woman!" But suddenly an abrupt gesture, a virile accent, or some cavalier manner would destroy in a minute my frail edifice of probabilities and cast me back into my primal uncertainty.

I would be sailing free over the boundless ocean of amorous reverie, and then you would come to fetch me to fence or to play tennis. The young girl, transformed into a young gentleman, hit me hard, sent the foil flying from my hands as smartly and quickly as the most experienced swashbuckler. Every moment in the day I had to suffer some such disappointment.

As I would approach you to say, "My dear beauty, it is you whom I adore," I would see you bend tenderly and whisper into a lady's ear madrigal on

madrigal, compliment on compliment. Imagine what I felt! Or else some woman, whom in my strange jealousy I would have skinned alive with the greatest delight, would hang herself on your arm, draw you aside, confide to you I know not what puerile secrets, and keep you for hours in the embrasure of a window.

I raged when I saw women speak to you, for that made me believe you were a man; and had you been one, it would have been extreme pain to me even to tolerate their speaking to you. When a man approached you freely and familiarly, I was even more jealous; I thought then that you were a woman, and that perhaps they suspected it, as I did. I was a prey to the most contrary passions, and I knew not which way to turn.

I grew wroth with myself; I addressed to myself the harshest reproaches at being so tormented by such a love, and not having the strength to uproot from my heart the venomous plant which had grown up in it in one night like a poisonous mushroom. I cursed you, I called you my evil genius. For a moment I thought you were Beelzebub in person, for I could not understand the sensations I felt when near you.

Once I was thoroughly convinced that you were in fact none else than a woman in disguise, the unlikelihood of the motive which I sought to find for such a caprice oppressed me, and again I would begin to deplore that the form which I dreamed of for the love of my soul happened to belong to one of the same sex as myself. I blamed fate, which had given to a man such a charming outward form, and for my everlasting misfortune had made me meet him at the moment when I no longer hoped to see or realise the absolute ideal of pure beauty which I had so long caressed within my heart.

Now, Rosalind, I have the deep conviction that you are the most beautiful of women. I have seen you in the apparel of your sex, I have seen your shoulders, your arms, so fair, so perfectly rounded. The little of your bosom which your neckerchief allowed to be seen can be but a young girl's bosom. Neither Meleager the handsome nor Bacchus the effeminate, with their beautiful forms, ever had such suave lines, such wondrous fineness of skin, although both are in Parian marble and polished by the loving kisses of twenty centuries. My anxieties are ended as far as that goes, — but that is not all. You are a woman;

my love is no longer reprehensible; I may yield to it without remorse, and be carried away by the current that takes me to you. However great, however mad the passion which I feel, it is allowable and I may own it. But you, Rosalind, for whom I burned in silence and who knew not the immensity of my love, you whom this late revelation may perhaps surprise, — do you not hate me? Do you love me? Can you love me? I know not, and I tremble, and am more wretched than before.

At times it seems to me that you do not hate me. When we played "As You Like It," you spoke certain lines in your part with an accent that deepened their meaning and urged me in some sort to declare myself. I thought I saw in your eyes and in your smile gracious promise of indulgence, and that I felt your hand return the pressure of mine. If I was mistaken — Oh, my God! I dare not think upon it. Encouraged by all this and urged by my love, I have written to you, for the dress you wear ill lends itself to such a confession; and many a time have the words stopped on my lips. Although I had the belief, the firm conviction, that I was speaking to a woman, your man's apparel frightened away all my

tender, loving thoughts, and prevented their flying towards you.

I beseech you, Rosalind, if you love me not yet, try to love me. Try to love me, who love you in spite of the veil in which you have wrapped yourself, out of pity for us, no doubt. Do not devote the rest of my life to the most dread despair and the most sorrowful discouragement. Remember that I have adored you since the first ray of thought shone within my brain; that you were revealed to me beforehand, and that when I was still a child you appeared to me in my dreams, with a crown of dewdrops, with prismatic wings, and the little blue flower in your hand; that you are the aim, the means, the meaning of my life; that without you I am but an empty show, and that if you extinguish the flame you have lighted, there will remain within me but a pinch of dust finer and more impalpable than that which is scattered on the wings of death itself. Rosalind, you who have so many recipes to cure love-sickness, cure me, for I am most love-sick. Play your part to the end. Cast away the dress of the fair page, Ganymede, and hold out your white hand to the youngest son of the brave knight, Roland du Bois.

XIV

I WAS at my window, occupied in watching the stars which were joyfully blooming in the heavens, and in breathing the perfume of the mirabilia wafted to me on a faint air. The draught from the open window had extinguished my lamp, the last which remained lighted in the mansion. My thoughts were turning into a vague reverie, and a sort of sleepiness began to creep over me. Nevertheless, I still remained leaning on the stone balustrade, either fascinated by the charm of night or careless and forgetful. Rosette, no longer perceiving the light in my room, and unable to see me because of a great shadow which fell exactly over the window, no doubt thought that I had gone to bed; and this was what she was waiting for to risk a last and desperate attempt. She opened the door so gently that I did not hear her come in, and she was within two steps of me before I perceived her. She was much astonished to perceive that I was still up. She came to me and took me by the arm, calling me twice by my name, — "Theodore, Theodore!"

"What! you, Rosette, here at such an hour, without a light and in such a perfect deshabille?"

I must tell you that my beauty had on but a night-wrapper of exquisitely fine cambric, and the famous lace-edged chemise which I would not look at on the day of the unforgetable scene in the little kiosk in the park. Her arms, polished and cold as marble, were quite bare, and the cambric that covered her body was so soft and transparent that the nipples of her breasts showed as do those on the statues of bathers covered with wet drapery.

"Is it a reproach that you address to me, Theodore, or is it merely an exclamation? Yes, I, Rosette, the fair lady, here in your room, — not in my own where I ought to be, at eleven, at midnight perhaps, — without duenna or chaperon or maid; almost nude, in a mere night-wrapper. Very astonishing, is it not? I am as surprised as you can be, and I scarce know how to explain it."

As she said this, she put her arm around me and let herself fall on the foot of my bed so as to drag me down with her.

"Rosette," said I, endeavouring to disengage myself, "I shall try to light the lamp again. There is

nothing so gloomy as darkness in a room; and then it is really wicked not to see when you are there, and to deprive myself of the sight of your beauty. Let me make, with a piece of tinder and a match, a little portable sun, which shall bring out all that jealous night effaces with its shadows."

"It is not worth while. I would rather that you should not behold my blushes. My cheeks are burning, — I feel as if I should die with shame."

She pressed her face to my breast and remained in that attitude for a few moments as if overcome by her emotions. For me, as she spoke, I mechanically passed my fingers through the long curls of her hair, which was undone. I sought in my brain for some decent way of getting out of my embarrassment, but found none, for I was literally in the last ditch, and Rosette appeared perfectly determined not to leave the room in the same condition in which she had entered it. Her dress had a terrible free-and-easiness about it which promised nothing good. I myself had on but a dressing-gown, which would have very ill defended my incognito, so that I was exceedingly uneasy as to the issue of the encounter.

"Theodore, listen to me," said Rosette, rising and

throwing back her hair from the two sides of her face, as well as I could make out by the faint light which the stars and the very wan crescent of the moon, now rising, shed in the room, the window of which had remained open. "The step I have taken is strange, everybody would blame me for it; but you are soon going away, and I love you. I cannot let you go thus, without having an explanation with you. Perhaps you will never come back, — perhaps it is the first and last time I am to see you. Who knows whither you will go? But wherever you do go, you will take me and my love still with you. Had you remained I should never have done this. The happiness of seeing you and hearing you and living by you would have been sufficient. I would have asked nothing more. I would have concealed my love within my heart. You would have thought I was no more than a good and sincere friend. But this may not be. You say you must absolutely go. It wearies you, Theodore, to see me attached to your steps like a living shadow which cannot but follow you, and which seeks to form part of you. It displeases you, no doubt, always to find behind you beseeching eyes, and hands outstretched to seize the hem of your mantle. I know it, but I

cannot help doing it. Besides, you have no reason to complain of it. I was calm, tranquil, almost happy before I knew you. You arrived, handsome, young, smiling, like unto Phœbus the charming god. You have been most delicately attentive to me, most careful. Never was a lover wittier and more gallant. Every moment roses and rubies fell from your lips; you turned everything into an opportunity for a madrigal, and you knew how to make the most insignificant phrases into adorable compliments. A woman who might have hated you mortally at first would have ended by loving you, and I — I loved you from the moment when I first saw you. Why, then, do you appear so surprised at being so much loved, — you who have been so lovable? Is it not a very natural consequence? I am neither foolish nor light-headed, nor a romantic little girl who falls in love with the first sword she sees. I am accustomed to society, I know what life is. What I am doing, any woman — even the most virtuous, even the most prudish — would have done too. What was your idea, what was your intention? To make me fond of you, I suppose, — for I cannot believe you had any other. How is it, then, that you seem to regret having succeeded so well?

Have I unwittingly done anything to displease you? I beseech you to forgive me. Do you no longer think me fair? Have you discovered in me some defect which drives you away? You have the right to be exacting as to beauty, but either you have lied greatly, or I also am beautiful. I am young like yourself, I love you. Why do you now disdain me? You were so attentive to me, you supported my arm with such solicitude, you pressed my hand so tenderly when I gave it to you, you looked at me with such languorous glances! If you did not love me, why did you do all that? Were you cruel enough to awaken love in my heart so that afterwards you might laugh at it? It would be horrible mockery, impiety, sacrilege. Only an evil soul could thus amuse itself, and I cannot believe it of you, however inexplicable your conduct towards me. What, then, is the cause of this sudden change? I cannot see any. What mystery does your coolness conceal? I cannot believe that you feel repugnance for me. What you have done proves that you do not, for no one, not even the greatest hypocrite on earth, could court so hotly a woman for whom he felt distaste. Oh, Theodore, what have you against me? What has changed you

thus? What have I done to you? If the love which you seemed to feel for me has vanished, my love for you still remains and I cannot uproot it from my heart. Have pity on me, Theodore, for I am most unhappy. Pretend, at least, to love me a little, and speak some sweet words to me. It will not cost you much unless you feel for me an invincible horror."

At this pathetic point in her plaint, her sobs completely stifled her voice, she crossed her two hands on my shoulder and laid her brow on them in an attitude of utter despair. All she said was absolutely true, and I had not a word to say in reply. I could not assume a bantering tone; it would have been highly improper. Rosette was not one who could be treated so lightly; and besides, I was too deeply moved to do it. I felt guilty at having thus trifled with the heart of a charming woman, and I was a prey to the liveliest and most sincere remorse.

Seeing that I did not answer her, the dear girl drew a deep sigh and made as if she would rise, but she fell back, broken by emotion. Then she clasped me in her arms, the cool touch penetrating through my doublet, put her face close to mine, and began to weep silently. Strange was the sensation as I felt streaming

over my cheeks that inexhaustible current of tears which came not from my own eyes. Before long I mingled my own with hers, and it was a regular pouring rain, fit to cause a new deluge if only it had lasted forty days.

At this moment the moon happened to shine exactly in the window; a pale beam penetrated the room and lighted up with its bluish light the silent group that we formed. In her white wrapper, with her arms, her bosom, her breasts bare and almost as white as the cambric she wore, her loosened hair and her expression of grief, Rosette looked like an alabaster figure of melancholy seated on a tomb. As for myself, I do not quite know what I looked like, for I could not see myself and there was no mirror to reflect my image; but I fancy that I could very well have passed for a statue of incarnate uncertainty. I was agitated, and caressed Rosette more tenderly than usual. My hand had slipped from her hair to her velvety neck, and from that to her round and polished shoulder, which I smoothed gently, and the trembling line of which I felt. The girl quivered under my touch like an instrument at the touch of a musician; her flesh shuddered and worked perpetually, and amorous tremblings ran over her body.

I myself felt a sort of confused desire, the aim of which I could not make out, but I experienced deep pleasure in feeling the contour of her bare and delicate form. I abandoned her shoulder, and profiting by an opening of a fold, I suddenly enclosed in my hand a frightened little breast, which palpitated madly like a dove surprised in its nest. From the extreme contour of her cheek, which I kissed with the lightest of kisses, I reached her half-opened lips. We remained thus for some time. I really cannot tell you if it was a minute, or fifteen, or sixty, for I wholly lost any idea of time and knew not if I were in heaven or on earth or dead. The intoxicating wine of voluptuousness had made me so drunken with the first sip I had swallowed that any reason I possessed had vanished. Rosette clasped me closer and closer in her arms, and enveloped me with her body. She bent convulsively over me and pressed me to her bare, heaving bosom. At each kiss her life seemed to run to the place I had touched, abandoning the rest of her person. Strange thoughts flashed through my brain. Had I not feared to betray my incognito, I should have given free rein to the passionate impulses of Rosette, and perhaps I should have made some vain, mad attempt to give a seeming

of reality to that shadow of pleasure which my fair amorous one embraced so ardently. I had never yet had a lover, and her sharp attacks, her repeated caresses, the contact of her lithe body, the sweet names lost in kisses, agitated me extremely, although they came from a woman. And then, this nocturnal visit, this romantic passion, the moonlight, — all these together were to me full of a freshness and of a charm of novelty that made me forget I was not a man after all.

However, making a great effort, I told Rosette she was compromising herself horribly by coming to my room at such an hour and remaining so long in it; that her maids might notice her absence and perceive that she had not spent the night in her own chamber. I said it so weakly that Rosette, for sole reply, let fall her cambric wrapper, threw off her slippers, and slipped into my bed like an adder into a jar of milk; for she imagined that my clothes alone prevented my coming to a more precise demonstration, and that they were the sole obstacle which kept me back. She believed, poor child, that the hour so laboriously brought about was at last about to strike for her, — but it was only two o'clock in the morning that struck.

My position could not have been more critical, when the door turned on its hinges and gave passage to Mr. Alcibiades in person. He held a candle in one hand, and a sword in the other. He went straight to the bed, threw back the blanket, and placing the light close to the face of Rosette, who seemed confounded, he said to her in a tone of raillery, "Good-morning, sister."

Poor little Rosette had not the strength to reply to him.

"So it seems, my very dear and very virtuous sister, that, having judged in your wisdom that Master Theodore's bed was pleasanter than yours, you have come to lie in it. Or perhaps there are ghosts in your room, and you thought that you would be safer in this one under the guard of the aforesaid gentleman. That is a very good idea. Ah, Mr. de Sérannes, so you have been ogling my sister, and you think that is going to be the end of it. I am of opinion that it would not be at all a bad thing for us to cut each other's throats a little bit, and if you are good enough to do your part, I shall be greatly obliged to you. Theodore, you have abused the friendship which I felt for you. You have made me repent

of the opinion which I first formed of the loyalty of your character."

I could not defend myself properly; appearances were all against me. Who would have believed me if I had said, what was the truth, — that Rosette had come to my arms in spite of myself, and that, far from trying to make her love me, I was doing the utmost I could to drive her from me? There was but one thing for me to say, and I said it: "Sir Alcibiades, we will slash each other as much as you please."

During this conversation Rosette had not failed to faint, according to the most correct rules of pathos. I went to a crystal cup of water, — in which was plunged the stem of a great white rose, half the petals of which had fallen, — cast some drops in her face, and caused her quickly to recover her senses. Not quite knowing what to do with herself, she snuggled up in the farther corner of the bed, and hid her pretty head in the blanket like a bird that is cuddling down to sleep. She had so pulled up the sheets and pillows around her that it would have been very difficult to make out what there was under the heap. A few soft sighs which issued from time to time alone would have enabled one to guess that it was a young and repentant sinner; or, at

least, one very sorry to be a sinner in intention only, and not in fact, — which was the case of the unfortunate Rosette.

Her brother, freed from anxiety regarding his sister, resumed his conversation and said to me more gently: "It is not absolutely indispensable that we should cut each other's throats at once, — that is an extreme measure which there is always time to resort to. Listen to me. A duel between us would not be quite fair. You are in early youth and much less vigorous than I; if we were to fight, I should certainly kill you or cripple you, and I would rather neither kill nor disfigure you, — it would be a great pity. Rosette under her blankets yonder, not saying a word, would hate me for it her life long, for she is tigerish and bitter in bearing a grudge, once she sets about it, that dear little dove. You do not know it, for you are Prince Galaor, and she bestows upon you charming delights only, but she is not all sweetness. Rosette is free, you also; it would seem that you are not irreconcilable foes. Her widowhood is drawing to an end, and things will thus turn out in the best possible way. Marry her; then she will not have to go back to her own bed; and for me, I shall thus be saved having to make you

into a sheath for my sword, which would be agreeable neither to you nor to me. What think you of it?"

I must have pulled a very long face, for his plausible proposition was precisely the one which I could not accept. I could more readily have walked on all-fours on the ceiling like a fly, or brought down the sun without a footstool to help me, than do what he wanted, and yet his latter proposition was undoubtedly more agreeable than his first. He seemed surprised at my not accepting with delight, and repeated his words as if to give me time to reply.

"An alliance with you would indeed be most honourable for me, and I should never have dared to pretend to it. I am aware that it is marvellous fortune for a young man who has neither rank nor weight in the world, and that the most illustrious of men would esteem themselves lucky did they have the same chance. Nevertheless, I must persist in my refusal, and since I am free to choose between a duel and a wedding, I prefer the duel. It is an erratic taste, not a very common one, but it is my taste."

Here Rosette uttered the most dolorous of sobs, put her head out from below the pillow, and, when she saw my firm and impassible countenance, pulled

it in again immediately, like a snail whose horns are struck.

"It is not because I do not love Mistress Rosette, — I love her deeply; but I have certain reasons why I will not marry, which you yourself would consider excellent, if it were possible for me to tell you them. Besides, matters have not gone as far as you might believe from appearances. Bar a few kisses, which our somewhat lively friendship suffices to explain and justify, nothing has occurred between us that might not be told, and the virtue of your sister is unquestionably the most intact and the cleanest in the world. I am bound to state this much. And now at what time shall we fight, Mr. Alcibiades, and where?"

"Here, on the spot!" cried Alcibiades, mad with anger.

"What are you thinking of? In Rosette's presence?"

"Defend yourself, you scoundrel, or I will murder you!" he continued, brandishing his sword and waving it around his head.

"At least, let us leave the room."

"If you don't fall on guard I will pin you to the wall, my handsome Celadon, and you may then flap your wings as much as you like, — you will not get

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clear, I warn you." And he dashed at me with his sword.

I drew my rapier, or he certainly would have carried out his threat, and at first I was satisfied to parry the lunges he made at me. Rosette made a superhuman effort to throw herself between our swords, for the two antagonists were equally dear to her, but her strength abandoned her and she fell fainting at the foot of the bed.

Our swords flashed and rattled like a hammer on an anvil, for the small space we had at our disposal forced us to engage very closely. Twice or thrice Alcibiades nearly hit me, and had I not had an excellent fencing-master my life would have been in the very greatest danger, for he was amazingly skilful and prodigiously strong. He made use of every ruse and feint known in fencing to get at me. Maddened at his ill success he uncovered himself twice or thrice. I did not care to profit by the opportunity, but he returned to the charge with such bitter and savage violence that I was forced to utilise the chances that he gave me. Besides, the noise and the whirling flash of steel intoxicated and dazzled me. I was not thinking of death and was not in the least afraid; the

sharp, deadly point which gleamed every second before my eyes embarrassed me no more than if I had been fencing with buttoned foils; but I was indignant with Alcibiades for his brutality, and the consciousness of my perfect innocence still further increased my indignation. I merely wished to scratch his arm or shoulder to make him drop his sword, for I had vainly endeavoured to force it out of his hands, — he had a wrist of steel, and the devil himself could not have made him budge.

At last he lunged so sharply and fiercely that I was unable to more than half parry; my sleeve was pierced, and I felt the cold steel touch my arm, but I was not wounded. I was filled with anger at the sight, and instead of remaining on the defensive I attacked in my turn; I forgot that he was Rosette's brother, and I went at him as if he had been my mortal enemy. Profiting by a false position of his sword, I lunged in such close flanconnade that I struck him in the side. He uttered a "Ho!" and fell backwards.

I thought he was dead, but in reality he was only wounded, and his fall was due to a false step which he made while trying to retire. I cannot describe to

you, Graciosa, the sensations I felt. Of course it is not difficult to conclude that if you lunge at flesh with a fine, sharp point, you will make a hole in it and the blood will come out; nevertheless, I was thunderstruck when I saw a red stream run down Alcibiades' doublet. I do not suppose I had fancied that sawdust would come out, as out of the ripped-up stomach of a doll, but I know that I never in my life felt such great surprise, and it seemed to me as if something incredible had just happened. What was really incredible was not that blood should flow from the wound, but that the wound should have been dealt by me, and that a girl of my age — I was going to write a young fellow — should have overcome a vigorous soldier well used to sword-play such as was Alcibiades; and all this for the crime of seduction, and for having refused marriage with a very rich, and furthermore, a very charming woman!

I was really most painfully embarrassed, — the sister having swooned, the brother lying dead as I believed, and I myself not very far from fainting or dying like the one or the other. I clutched the bell-rope and rang fit to wake the dead, until the rope broke; and leaving Rosette, who was unconscious,

and Alcibiades, whom I had ripped up, to explain matters to the servants and to the old lady, I marched straight to the stables.

The fresh air restored me at once. I led out my horse, saddled and bridled him myself; I made sure that the crupper was firm, that the bit was in good condition; I saw that the stirrups were of the same length, and tightened the girths by one hole. In a word, I saddled him completely, with a care that was somewhat strange at such a time, and with a coolness quite incomprehensible after a combat which had ended like this one.

I mounted my steed and traversed the park by a path I knew of. The branches of the trees, laden with dew, whipped my face and wetted me. One might have thought that the old trees were stretching out their arms to hold me back and preserve me for the love of their mistress. Had I been in another state of mind or slightly superstitious, I could have easily believed that they were so many phantoms trying to seize me and threatening me with their fists.

But I had no thoughts in my mind, — neither these nor any others. A leaden stupor, so deep that I was scarce conscious of it, weighed down on my brain

like a helmet too small for me. It did indeed seem to me that I had killed some one somewhere about there, and that this was the reason why I was going. For the rest, I was horribly sleepy, either because of the lateness of the hour or because the violence of the emotions of the night had caused a physical reaction and bodily fatigue.

I reached a small postern gate which opened on the fields by a secret lock, which Rosette had shown me in our rides; I dismounted, touched the button, and pushed open the gate. I got into the saddle again, after leading my horse out, and sent him at a gallop until I came to the highroad to C——, which I reached in the grey dawn.

And such is the very faithful and very circumstantial history of my first love fortune and my first duel.

XV

IT was five o'clock in the morning when I entered the city. The houses were beginning to wake up; the worthy natives showed behind the panes their kindly faces surmounted by pyramidal night-caps. At the sound of my horse's steps, which sounded upon the uneven and pebbly pavement, out of every skylight shot the big faces, singularly red, and the bosoms in their early morning undress, of the Venuses of the place, who made endless conjectures upon this most unusual apparition of a traveller in C—— at such an hour and in such a costume, — for I was very scantily dressed, and my appearance was, to say the least, suspicious. I made a little chap, whose hair was away down over his eyes and who put up his little dog-nose to contemplate me more comfortably, tell me of an inn. I gave him a few sous for his pains, and a right good cut with my riding-whip, which made him flee squeaking like a jay plucked alive.

I cast myself on a bed and slept soundly. When I awoke, it was three o'clock in the afternoon; yet

I was scarcely thoroughly rested. And indeed, it was not too much, after a sleepless night, a love affair, a duel, and a very rapid, though most successful flight.

I was very anxious concerning Alcibiades' wound, but a few days later I was completely reassured on learning that it had had no dangerous consequences, and that he was fully convalescent. This news relieved me of a singular burden, for the thought of having killed a man worried me strangely, although it was a case of legitimate defence and done against my own will. I had not yet reached that sublime indifference to men's lives which I have since attained.

At C—— I had the pleasure of coming upon several young fellows with whom we had travelled. I became more intimate with them, and they introduced me into several pleasant houses. I was perfectly accustomed to my clothes, and the rougher and more active life which I had led and the violent exercise which I had taken had made me twice as robust as I formerly was. I went everywhere with these young scapegraces; I rode, hunted, and shared their orgies with them; for little by little I had trained myself to drink, and without equalling the Teutonic capacity of certain of them, I could manage to dispose

of two or three bottles for my own share without being too tipsy, — a most satisfactory progress. As for swearing I had at my disposal an abundant wealth of variants of "by God," and I deliberately enough kissed the maids of the inns. In a word, I was an accomplished young gentleman, quite up to the latest pattern. I got rid of certain provincial ideas which I still entertained upon virtue and other such nonsense, and on the other hand, I became so prodigiously punctilious on the point of honour that I fought a duel almost every day. It had indeed become almost a necessity for me, a sort of indispensable exercise without which I should not have felt well the whole day long; so, when no one had looked at me or trodden on my toe, when I had no reason to fight, then, rather than remain idle and not use my hands, I would serve my comrades as second, or I would even act in that capacity for people whom I knew by name only. I soon acquired a colossal renown for bravery, and nothing less was needed to stop the jokes which my beardless face and my effeminate air would undoubtedly have provoked; but three or four additional buttonholes which I made in doublets, and some strips of skin which I most delicately ripped up on a few recalcitrant

people caused me to be generally thought to look more virile than Mars or Priapus themselves, and you could have met with people who were ready to swear that they had stood godfathers to bastards of mine.

With all that apparent dissipation, with all that wasteful, absurd way of life, I nevertheless followed out my original idea, — that is, the conscientious study of man and the solution of the problem of the perfect lover; a problem rather more difficult to solve than that of the philosopher's stone. There are certain ideas which resemble the horizon; it undoubtedly exists, since you see it in front of you whichever way you turn, but it retires obstinately before you, and, whether you walk or whether you gallop, it is always at the same distance, for it can only show under a given condition of distance. It disappears as you advance, to reappear farther away with its fleeting, never-to-be-grasped azure, and it is in vain that you try to stop it by clutching the hem of its floating mantle.

The more I got to know the beast, man, the more I perceived how impossible was the realisation of my wish, and how completely what I required in order to love happily was beyond the bounds of its nature. I became convinced that the man who would be most

sincerely in love with me would find a way, though with the best will in the world, to make me the most wretched of women; and yet I had already parted with many of my exigencies as a maiden; I had come down from the lofty clouds, not quite into the street and the gutter, but to a hill of moderate height, accessible though somewhat steep. The ascent, it is true, was rather hard, but I was conceited enough to believe that I was well worth making the effort, and that I would be a sufficient compensation for the trouble which would be taken. I could never have made up my mind to take a single step to meet my lover; I waited patiently upon my summit.

Here was my plan. Under my man's apparel I proposed to get acquainted with some young fellow whose appearance took my fancy; to live on familiar terms with him; by skilful questions and false confidences to provoke genuine ones, and thus soon to come to know thoroughly his feelings and his thoughts; then, if I found him what I wished him to be, I would leave on some pretended trip, and keep away from him for three or four months to give him a little time to forget my features. Returning dressed as a woman, I would have fitted up in some retired quarter a volup-

tuous little house hidden in trees and flowers; next, so managed matters that he would meet me and call on me; and finally, if his love proved true and faithful, I would give myself to him without restriction and without precaution. I should have considered it an honourable title to be called his mistress, and I should not have asked him to call me anything else.

Undoubtedly that plan will not be carried out, for it is of the essence of plans which one makes that they are not carried out, and herein are chiefly exhibited the frailty of the will and the true nothingness of man. The proverb, "What woman wills, God wills," is not a bit more true than any other proverb, — in other words, it is not true.

So long as I had seen men from afar only, and through the veil of my desire, they had seemed handsome to me. It was an optical illusion. Now I think them most hideous, and I cannot understand how any woman can bear to have a man in bed with her. As for me, it makes me sick to think of it, and I could never make up my mind to it. Their features are coarse and ignoble, lacking delicacy and elegance; the lines are broken and ungraceful! The skin, harsh, dark and wrinkled; sometimes tanned as if the owner

had been hung for six months! They are ghastly, bony, hairy creatures with fiddle-strings on the backs of their hands, great feet like drawbridges, and a dirty moustache always full of food and curled up to the ears! Their hair is as rough as the bristles of a broom, and shining like a wild boar's; their lips are chapped and burned by strong drink, their eyes ringed with four or five dark circles, their necks full of twisted veins, big muscles, and prominent cartilage. Some are padded with red flesh and carry before them a corporation scarce held in by their belt. They wink their little sea-green eyes aflame with lust, and are more like hippopotami in breeches than human creatures. They alway stink of brandy or wine or tobacco, or of their natural smell, which is by far the worst of all. As for those whose outward form is somewhat less disgusting, they are like badly made women, that is all.

I had not noticed all that. I had gone through life as on a cloud, and my feet scarce touched the earth. The scent of the roses and the lilies of springtime went to my head like a heavy perfume. I dreamed only of accomplished heroes, faithful and respectful lovers, passion worthy of the altar, marvellous devotion

and sacrifices, — and I expected to find all that in the first rascal that said good-day to me. However, that early coarse intoxication did not last long; strange suspicions entered into my mind, and I had no rest until I had cleared them up.

At first the horror which I felt for men was carried to the extreme of exaggeration, and I looked upon them as awful monstrosities. Their manners, their cynical language, their brutality, and their contempt for women shocked and revolted me beyond description, so thoroughly contrary to reality was the idea which I had formed of them. They may not be monsters, if you please, but they are very much worse, by my faith! They are excellent fellows of most jovial temper, who drink deep and eat hard; who will do you all sorts of services; clever, brave; good painters, good musicians, — fit for ever so many things, except, however, the single one for which they have been created, which is to be the male of the animal called woman, whom they do not in the least resemble either physically or morally.

At first I found it very difficult to disguise the contempt they inspired me with, but little by little I got accustomed to their mode of life. I felt no more hurt

by the sarcasms they launched against women than if I had myself been of their sex. On the contrary, I indulged in very excellent hits myself, and the success they met with greatly flattered my pride. Unquestionably none of my comrades went as far as I did in the way of satires and jokes on this point. My perfect acquaintance with the subject gave me a great advantage; and besides the piquant turn which they possessed, my epigrams had an accuracy which was often lacking in theirs. For, although all the evil that is said of women is always true in some respect, it is nevertheless difficult for men to keep cool enough to rail at them properly, and very often love mingles with their invectives. I have noticed that it was those who were most tender and who best understood women, who treated them worse than any others, and who returned to the subject with peculiar bitterness, as if they bore them an eternal grudge for not being such as they wished them to be, and for having failed to come up to the good opinion which they had formed of them at the outset.

What I wanted, first and foremost, was not physical beauty or the beauty of the soul, but love; only, love, as I feel it, is perhaps not a human possibility. Never-

theless, it seemed to me that that would be the way I should love, and that I would give in return more than I exact.

What splendid folly! what sublime prodigality! To give one's self up wholly, without keeping aught back; to renounce self-possession and free will, to submit one's will to another, to see only through his eyes, to hear through his ears, to be but one in two bodies, to mingle and confound souls so that you no longer know whether you are yourself or the other, to absorb and to give out continually, to be now the moon and now the sun, to have the whole world, the whole creation, centred in one being, to displace the centre of life and to be ready at any time for the greatest sacrifices and for the most complete self-devotion, to suffer on the breast of the beloved as if it were your own — oh, prodigy! to become twice yourself by giving yourself — that is love such as I conceive it.

As for being faithful like the ivy, clasping like the young vine, and cooing like the turtle-dove, that is a matter of course; these are the first and simplest conditions.

Had I remained at home in the dress of my sex, occupied in spinning in melancholy fashion, or em-

broidering behind a pane in the embrasure of a window, what I have been looking for through the world would perhaps have come of itself to find me. Love is like fortune, it does not like to be run after. It prefers to visit those that have fallen asleep on the edge of a well, and often the kisses of queens and gods light upon closed eyes. It is an alluring but deceitful belief to fancy that all adventures and all happiness are to be found only in those places where you are not, and it is a mistake to have your horse saddled and to post off in quest of your ideal. Many people commit that mistake, many more will commit it. The horizon is always of the loveliest azure, although when you reach it the hills which form it are nothing but worn, cracked clay, or ochre washed by the rain.

I imagined that the world was full of adorable young fellows, and the roads crowded with Esplandians, Amadis, and Lancelots of the Lake in pursuit of their Dulcineas, and I was greatly amazed to find that the world troubled itself very little about that sublime pursuit, and was satisfied with the first woman that came along for a bedfellow. I have been severely punished for my curiosity and my imprudence; I am enlightened in the most horrible manner possible, without having

had any enjoyment. In me knowledge has forestalled use, and there is nothing worse than those forced experiences which are not the fruit of action. The most thorough ignorance would be a hundred times better, — at least, you would commit many a mistake which would serve to instruct you and to rectify your thoughts; for under the disgust of which I spoke just now there is always a quick, rebellious element which causes the strangest disorders in me. My mind is convinced, but my body is not, and refuses to share in that proud disdain. My young, strong body plunges and kicks under the mind like a vigorous stallion ridden by a weak old man, whom, however, it cannot throw, for the martingale holds its head, and the bit tears its mouth.

Since I have been living with men I have seen so many women shamefully-betrayed, so many secret intrigues imprudently divulged, the purest of love carelessly dragged through the mud, young men hastening to abominable courtesans as they leave the arms of the most charming mistresses, the firmest connections suddenly broken without plausible motive, that I can no longer make up my mind to have a lover. It would be leaping into the bottomless abyss in broad day with

open eyes. Yet the secret desire of my heart is still to have a lover. The voice of nature drowns the voice of reason. I feel very well that I shall never be happy if I do not love and am not loved in return. But the pity of it is that you can have a man only for a lover, and if men are not quite devils, they are very far from being angels. It would be vain for them to stick feathers on their shoulders and to put a halo of gold paper around their heads. I know them too well to be taken in by them. All the fine speeches they could rattle off to me would make no impression. I know beforehand what they are going to say, and I could finish their sentences for myself. I have seen them studying their parts; I know their most effective tirades and the passages upon which they count. Neither the pallor of their faces nor the change in their features could convince me, — I know that all that means nothing. An orgy of a night, a few bottles of wine, and two or three girls are quite sufficient to get up one's face very nicely. I have seen this fine recipe practised by a young marquis, very rosy and blooming naturally, with whom it succeeded admirably, and who owed it solely to that touching pallor, so beautifully obtained, to have his love crowned. I know,

too, how the most languorous of Celadons console themselves for the rigours of their Astræas, and find a means of being patient until the hour of love has struck; I have seen the slatterns who served as understudies to the chaste and prudish Ariadnes.

After these things, truth to tell, man does not tempt me much. For he has not beauty as women, — beauty, that splendid vestment which so thoroughly conceals the imperfections of the soul, that divine drapery cast by God over the nakedness of the world, and which, in a way, makes it excusable to love the vilest courtesan of the gutter if only she possesses the magnificent, regal gift. If I cannot have the virtues of the soul, I want at least the exquisite perfection of form, the satin flesh, the rounded contours, the suave lines, the soft skin, all that charms one in woman. Since I cannot have love, let me have, at least, voluptuousness, and replace the sister as well as I can by the brother. But all the men I see seem to me hideously ugly. My horse is a hundred times handsomer, and it would be far less repugnant to me to kiss it than to kiss certain fops who think themselves very attractive. Certainly popinjays such as I know many to be would not prove a very brilliant theme on which to embroider variations

of pleasure. A soldier would not suit me very well either. Military men have something mechanical in their gait, something beastly in their faces, which makes me look upon them as scarcely human. Lawyers do not enchant me any more. They are dirty, oily, bristly, shiny, with lack-lustre eyes and lipless mouths. They smell abominably of staleness and rottenness, and I should not feel the least desire to place my face against their lynx or weasel muzzles. As for poets, they think of nothing in the world but the end of words, and go no farther back than the penultimate syllable; and the saying that it is difficult to make any use of them is a true one. They are more wearisome than others, but they are just as ugly, and have not the least distinction or elegance in their appearance or their clothes — which is really remarkable. People who are occupied the live-long day with form and beauty, and who do not perceive that their boots are badly made and their hats absurd! They look like country chemists or trainers of learned dogs out of work, and they are enough to disgust you with poetry and verse for many an eternity.

As for the painters, they also are frightfully stupid. They can see nothing beyond the seven colours. One

of them, with whom I spent a few days at R——, and who was asked what he thought of me, made this ingenious reply: "He is of a rather warm tone in the shadows. You would have to use, instead of white, Naples yellow with a little Cassel earth and red brown." That was his opinion, — and furthermore, he had a crooked nose and squinted, which did not improve his case.

Whom, then, shall I take? A soldier, whose shirt-front sticks out; a lawyer with convex shoulders; a wild-eyed poet or painter; a little, thin, light-weight jackanapes? What cage shall I pick out in this menagerie? I really feel no more inclined in one direction than the other, for they are all as perfectly equal in stupidity and ugliness as it is possible to be. Then, of course, I might still do something else, — take some one whom I love, even were he a porter or a horse-dealer; but I do not care even for a porter.

Oh, unhappy heroine that I am! — unpaired turtle-dove, compelled to utter eternally mournful cooings! How often have I wished I really were the man I seem to be! How many women I have come across who could have understood me and whom I would have understood, whose hearts would have understood

my heart. How perfectly happy those love-inspired, delicate attentions, those noble impulses of pure passion to which I could have responded, would have made me! What suavity, what delight! How freely would that sensitive plant, my soul, have bloomed without being obliged to contract and close every minute under a coarse touch! What a charming flora of invisible flowers that will never open, and the mysterious perfume of which would have softly filled the fraternal soul! It seems to me that that would have been an enchanting life, an infinite ecstasy, with wings ever outspread; strolls with hands clasped that never unclasp, along shaded walks strewn with golden sand, through groves of roses ever smiling, in parks full of ponds on which glide the swans, with alabaster vases standing out against the foliage.

If I had been a young man, how I should have loved Rosette, how I should have adored her! Our souls were indeed made the one for the other, — two pearls designed to melt into one and to be one forever. How perfectly I should have realised the ideal she had formed of love! Her character suited me admirably, her style of beauty pleased me. What a pity that our love was absolutely doomed to indispensable platonism!

MADEMOISELLE DE MAUPIN

I met with an adventure lately. I called at a house where there was a charming young girl of some fifteen years at most. I have never seen a more adorable miniature. She was fair, but of such delicate and transparent fairness that ordinary fair women seem by her side terribly dark, black as moles. Her hair seemed to be gold powdered with silver. Her brows were of such a delicate, melting tint that they scarcely showed in outline. Her eyes, of the palest blue, had the most velvety glance and the silkiest lashes which you can possibly imagine. Her mouth, so small that you could not have put your finger in it, still further increased the childish and delicate character of her beauty, while the soft roundness and the dimples of her cheeks possessed inexpressibly ingenuous charm. The whole of her dear small person delighted me beyond expression. I loved her little, white, frail hands through which the daylight shone, her little birdlike foot that scarce touched the ground, her waist that a breath would have broken, and her pearly shoulders, still not fully formed, which her scarf, a little awry, so happily revealed. Her chatter, in which artlessness lent a piquancy to her natural wit, held me for hours at a time, and I took singular pleasure in making

her talk. She said a thousand delightful, nonsensical things, sometimes with extraordinary cleverness of intention, sometimes without appearing to understand their meaning fully, which made them ever so much more attractive. I gave her sweets and pastilles, which I kept expressly for her in a box of light-coloured tortoise-shell. This pleased her greatly, for she is very fond of sweets, like a dear little kitten that she is. As soon as I arrived she would run to me and feel in my pockets to see if the blessed bon-bon box was there. I would make it pass from one hand to the other, and that led to a little battle in which she necessarily triumphed, and ended by pillaging me completely.

One day, however, she merely bowed to me very gravely, and did not come as usual to see if the fountain of sweets was springing as ever in my pocket. She remained proudly upon her chair, upright, and her elbows well in.

"Well, Ninon," said I, "have you taken to liking salt, or are you afraid that the sweets will make your teeth fall out?" And as I said this I rapped the box, which gave out under my vest the most honeyed and sugary sound possible.

She put out her little tongue to the tip of her lips, as if to enjoy the ideal delight of the absent sweets, but she did not move. Then I drew the box from my pocket and began to swallow carefully the particular sweets which she loved above all. The instinct of gormandise was for a moment stronger than her resolve. She held out her hand to take some, but drew it back at once, saying, "I am too grown up now to eat sweets." And then she sighed.

"I had not observed that you had grown very much since last week. You must be like the mushrooms that spring up in a single night. Come here and let me measure you."

"You may laugh as much as you please," she replied with a charming pout, "I am no longer a little girl, and I mean to go on growing up."

"That is an excellent resolve, which you had better persevere in. And may I know, my young lady, wherefore these lofty ideas have come into your head, — for a week ago you seemed to think it very pleasant to be a little girl, and you ate up sweets without caring in the least whether you compromised your dignity."

My little friend looked at me with a strange air, cast a glance around, and when she was quite certain that

we could not be overheard she bent toward me in a mysterious fashion and said, "I have a lover."

"The devil you have! Now I am no longer surprised that you do not care for sweets. And yet you were wrong not to take some. You could have played with him that you were having a dinner party, or you could have exchanged them for a shuttlecock."

The child disdainfully shrugged her shoulders and looked at me as if she pitied me. As she still preserved her attitude of offended queen, I went on, "What is the name of that glorious personage? Arthur, I suppose, — or else Henry." These were two little boys with whom she was in the habit of playing, and whom she called her husbands.

"No, neither Arthur nor Henry," she said, fixing on me her clear, transparent eyes, — "a gentleman." She raised her hand above her head to give me an idea of his height.

"Is he as tall as that? Why, this is becoming serious. Who is this tall lover, then?"

"Mr. Theodore, I do not mind telling you, but you must not mention it to any one, — neither to mamma nor Polly (her governess), nor to your friends, who think that I am only a child and who would laugh at me."

I promised her the most inviolable secrecy. I was very curious to know who was this gallant personage; and the girl, seeing that I was turning the matter into a joke, hesitated to confide wholly in me.

Reassured by my promising on my word of honour that I would not say a word about the matter, she left her arm-chair, bent over the back of mine, and whispered very softly in my ear the name of her beloved.

I was thunderstruck. It was the Chevalier de G——, a filthy, unclean animal, with the morals of a schoolmaster and the figure of a drum-major; the most villanously debauched man whom it is possible to see; a satyr through and through, save for the goat's feet and the pointed ears. This news filled me with serious fears concerning dear little Ninon, and I promised myself to settle matters.

Some people just then came in and our conversation went no further. I withdrew to a corner and racked my brain to prevent matters growing worse; for it would have been a downright shame that so charming a creature should become the prey of such a thorough-paced scoundrel.

The girl's mother was a sort of a courtesan, who opened her house to gamesters and presided over a

circle of so-called wits. Wretched verse was read in her drawing-room, and good coin lost, which was a compensation. She had little affection for her daughter, whom she looked upon more as a sort of living certificate of age, which interfered with the falsifying of her own chronology. Besides, the girl was beginning to grow up, and her nascent charms gave rise to comparisons which were not advantageous to her prototype, somewhat worn by the wear of years and of men. The child was, therefore, rather neglected and left unprotected against the schemes of the rascals who frequented the house. If her mother had troubled about her, it probably would have been only to turn to account her youth, and to draw a revenue from her beauty and her innocence. Whichever way one looked at it, the doom that awaited her was not doubtful. This pained me, for she was a charming young creature, and unquestionably deserved a better fate, — a pearl of the purest water, lost in that foul-smelling mud-hole. This thought took such a hold on me that I resolved to get her away at any cost from that abominable house.

The first thing to be done was to prevent the chevalier from carrying out his intention. The best and

simplest way that occurred to me was to pick a quarrel with him and make him fight a duel. I found this most difficult, for he is the greatest of cowards and is more afraid of getting hurt than any one on earth. At last I insulted him so much and so unmistakably that he had to make up his mind to come on the ground, though very much against his will. I even threatened to have him thrashed by my lackey if he did not put a better face on the matter; he was a very good swordsman, but fear troubled him to such an extent that scarcely were our swords engaged than I saw my chance to present him with a nice little thrust, which sent him to bed for a fortnight. That was sufficient. I did not want to kill him, and I would just as lief that he should live — to be hung later; an attention for which he should have been more grateful to me.

Once my rascal was stretched out between the sheets and properly done up in bandages, there only remained to get the girl to make up her mind to leave the house. That was not very difficult.

I invented a story to account for the disappearance of her lover, which caused her extraordinary uneasiness. I told her that he had gone off with an actress of the troupe which was then playing in C——; this made

her very angry, as you will readily believe; but I consoled her by telling her all the evil I could about the chevalier, who was ugly and a drunkard and already old, and I wound up by asking her if she would not rather have me for her gallant. She replied that she was quite willing, because I was handsomer and my clothes were new. This artless reply, spoken with the greatest seriousness, made me laugh to tears. I worked her up, and did so well that I induced her to leave her home. A few nosegays, just about as many kisses, and a pearl necklace which I presented her with, delighted her in the highest degree, and she assumed in her young friends' presence a most comical air of importance.

I caused to be made a very elegant and very rich page's costume of about her size, for I could not take her away in her girl's dress unless I myself resumed my female apparel — which I would not do. I purchased a small horse, gentle and easy under the saddle, and yet fast enough to keep up with my Arab when I wanted to ride fast. Then I told my young beauty to try to come to the door at dusk, and that I would be there to meet her. This she did to the letter. I found her standing sentry behind the half-opened door.

I passed close to the house, she came out; I held out my hand to her, she put her foot upon the toe of my boot and sprang lightly on the crupper, for she was marvellously agile. I spurred my horse, and passing through seven or eight side streets, deserted at that time, I found means to return home without any one seeing us. I made her undress in order to put on her disguise, and I myself acted as her maid. She objected to it at first, and wished to dress herself alone, but I made her understand that this would waste a good deal of time and that, besides, as she was my mistress, there was nothing improper in it, and that it was always done between lovers. She would have been convinced by fewer reasons, and yielded to circumstances with the best grace in the world.

Her body was a little marvel of delicacy. Her arms, somewhat slight like those of any young girl, were inexpressibly suave in their outlines, and her nascent breasts were full of such charming promise that no bosom more developed could have borne the comparison. She still possessed all the grace of the child and yet had all the charm of the woman. She was at that adorable stage of transition from the little girl to the young girl, — a passing, inexpressible transition, a

delightful moment when beauty is full of hope, and when each day, instead of taking something from your charms, adds new perfections to them.

Her costume became her admirably. It gave her a slightly impudent, but most interesting and amusing air, which made her laugh to tears when I held the mirror for her to judge of the effect of her dress. I then made her eat a few biscuits dipped in sherry so as to give her courage and enable her the better to bear the fatigue of the ride.

Our horses were waiting in the court. She mounted hers pretty resolutely; I bestrode the other, and off we went. Night had now completely fallen, and a few scattered lights which went out successively testified that the honest town of C—— was virtuously occupied in the way that every provincial town should be on the stroke of nine.

We could not go very fast, for Ninon was not much of a horsewoman, and when her horse began to trot she clung to its mane with all her strength. Nevertheless, the next morning we were far enough away not to be caught up with unless great speed were made. But we were not pursued, or if we were it was in a direction opposite to that we had taken.

I became greatly attached to my little beauty. You were no longer with me, dear Graciosa, and I felt a mighty need of loving some one, of having with me a dog or a child to fondle. Ninon fulfilled that duty. She slept with me, and before falling asleep would throw her little arms around me. She conscientiously believed that she was my mistress, and in no wise suspected that I was not a man. Her great youth and her extreme innocence kept up this error, which I took very good care not to dispel. The kisses I bestowed on her thoroughly carried out her illusion, for her ideas did not go beyond that, and her desires were not yet active enough to make her suspect anything else. After all, she was but half mistaken. For, indeed, there is between herself and me the same difference that exists between a man and me. She is so diaphanous, so lissome, so light, of such a delicate and choice nature that she is a woman, even for me who am a woman, but who look like a Hercules beside her.

I am tall and dark, she is short and fair; her features are so soft that they cause my own to seem almost harsh and austere, and her voice is such a melodious warble that my own seems rough in comparison with

hers. Any man who might possess her would break her to pieces, and I am always afraid that the wind will blow her away some fine morning. I wish I could shut her up in a box with cotton-wool and hang her around my neck. You cannot imagine, my dear friend, how charming and clever she is, how full of little fondling fashions and pretty, dainty ways. She is indeed the most adorable creature that ever lived, and it would have been a great pity had she remained with her unworthy mother.

I felt a malicious joy in thus stealing away this treasure from the rapacity of men. I was the dragon which prevented its being approached, and if I could not enjoy her myself, at least no one else should do so — which is always a consoling thought, whatever the fellows who speak against egotism may say.

It was my intention to keep her as long as possible in her state of ignorance, and to have her near me until she herself no longer wished to remain or until I managed to settle her life. I took her with me, in her youth's dress, on all my trips hither and thither. This sort of life was particularly agreeable to her, and the pleasure she found in it helped her to bear the fatigue. Everywhere I was complimented on the exquisite

beauty of my page, and I have no doubt that many suspected the very opposite of the truth. A number even endeavoured to make sure for themselves, but I would not let my little girl speak to any one, and the curious were completely disappointed. Every day I discovered in this charming child some new quality which made me love her more, and caused me to congratulate myself on the resolution I had come to. Unquestionably, men were not worthy of possessing her, and it would have been a great pity that so charming a body and so charming a soul should have been given up to their brutal appetites and their cynical depravation.

A woman alone could love her delicately and tenderly enough. One side of my character, which could not have been developed in any other connection, and which came out through this one, is the need and the desire of protecting, which is usually a matter for men. I should have been extremely annoyed, had I taken a lover, at his assuming to defend me, because that is a care which I prefer to take with people whom I like, and my pride enjoys much more the leading part than the secondary one, although the secondary is more agreeable. So I was glad to be able to render to my

dear little one all the attentions which I should have liked to receive, such as to help her on a rough ride, to hold her rein and her stirrup, to wait on her at table, to undress her, and to put her to bed, to defend her if any one insulted her, — in a word, to do everything for her that the most passionate and tender lover does for the mistress he adores.

Little by little I was losing consciousness of my own sex, and scarcely did I remember at long intervals that I was a woman. At first it often happened that I would thoughtlessly say something that did not agree with the dress I wore, but now it never occurs, and even when I write to you, who are the confidante of my secret, I sometimes use needlessly virile adjectives. If ever the fancy strikes me to go and pull my skirts out of the drawer in which I have left them, — which I do not believe, unless I fall in love with some handsome young fellow, — I shall have some difficulty in getting rid of this habit, and instead of being a woman disguised as a man, I shall look like a man disguised as a woman. The truth is that I belong to neither of these sexes. I have neither the idiotic submissiveness, the timidity, nor the meanness of a woman, nor have I the vices of a man, his disgusting crapulence, his

brutal inclinations. I belong to a third or separate sex, as yet unnamed, higher or lower, more defective or superior. I have the beauty and the soul of a woman, the mind and the strength of a man; but I have too much or not enough of one and the other to be coupled with either of them.

Oh, Graciosa, never shall I be able to love entirely a man or a woman. There is something unappeasable which murmurs in me, and the lover or the friend corresponds to but one side of my character. If I had a lover, what there is of womanly in me would no doubt for a time overcome the virile side, but it would not last long, and I feel that I should be only half contented. If I have a female friend, the thought of carnal pleasure prevents me enjoying thoroughly the pure delight of the soul, so that I know not where to stop, and I hesitate constantly between one and the other.

I would like to be of either sex alternately in order to satisfy this double nature of mine, — a man to-day, to-morrow a woman. I should keep for my lovers my languorous tenderness, my submissive and devoted ways, my softest caresses, my gentle sighs whispered in melancholy manner, all that in my character partakes

of the nature of the cat and the woman. Then, with my mistresses I should be enterprising, bold, passionate, with a domineering manner, my hat cocked on my ear, and the mien of a hectoring gentleman-adventurer. Then my whole nature would show out, and I should be perfectly happy; for true happiness is the capacity of developing freely in every direction, and of being everything that one can be.

But these are impossible things, and I must not think of them.

I had carried off the young girl with the hope of deceiving my inclinations and of turning upon some one all that vague tenderness which wells up in my soul and overflows it. I had taken her as a sort of safety valve for my hours of loving. But I soon recognised, in spite of all the affection which I felt for her, what an immense void, what a bottomless abyss she yet left in my heart, and how little her tenderest caresses satisfied me. I determined then to try a lover, but it was long before I met one who was not repulsive to me. I had forgotten to tell you that Rosette, having discovered whither I had gone, had written me a most beseeching letter, asking me to come and see her. I could not refuse, and I joined her in the country-house

where she then was. I have returned there several times since, and even quite recently. Rosette, despairing at not having obtained me for her lover, had thrown herself into the whirl of society and into dissipation. Like all tender souls who are not chastely inclined and who have been disappointed in their first love, she had had a great many adventures in a short time, and the list of her conquests was already very long, for everybody had not the same reasons to resist her that I had.

She had with her a young gentleman called d'Albert, who was then her declared lover. I appeared to make a very strong impression upon him and he immediately developed a very lively friendship for me.

Although he treated her with much attention and had towards her a manner which was singularly tender, at bottom he did not love Rosette, — not from satiety or disgust, but rather because she did not come up to certain notions, true or false, which he had of love and beauty. A vaporous ideal interposed between her and him, and prevented his being as happy as he would have been but for that. Evidently he had never realised his dream, and he sighed after something unattained, but he did not look for it and remained faithful to bonds

that weighed upon him. For he does possess a soul somewhat fuller of delicacy and honour than most men's, and his heart is far from being as corrupt as mine. Unaware that Rosette had never been in love with any one but myself, and still was so, in spite of her intrigues and her follies, he feared to afflict her by allowing her to see that he did not love her. This thought kept him back, and he sacrificed himself in the most generous way possible.

The style of my features pleased him extraordinarily, for he attaches importance to external appearance, — to such an extent, indeed, that he fell in love with me in spite of my masculine apparel and the formidable sword which I wear. I confess that I was grateful to him for his keen instinct, and that I felt some esteem for him because he had made me out under my deceitful dress. At the outset he thought himself endowed with a taste far more depraved than it really was, and I laughed inwardly at seeing him so tormented. Sometimes when he accosted me he wore so troubled a look that it amused me beyond expression, and the very natural inclination which drew him to me appeared to him a diabolical impulse which he could not fight against too hard. On such occasions he would turn

furiously back to Rosette and try to resume more orthodox habits of love; naturally he came back to me more passionate than before. Then the luminous thought that I might well be a woman, after all, made its way into his mind. To convince himself of the fact, he began to observe and study me with the most minute attention. He must certainly know every separate hair on my head and exactly how many lashes there are on my eyelids. He examined, compared, analysed everything, — my feet, my hands, my neck, my cheeks, and the almost imperceptible down at the corner of my lips; and this investigation, in which the artist helped the lover, ended in proving to him as clear as day — when it is clear — that I was truly and really a woman, and furthermore his ideal, his type of beauty, the realisation of his dream — a marvellous discovery!

It then only remained for him to bring me to be kind and to induce me to present him with the gift of love, in order to make my sex perfectly plain. A play which we gave, and in which I performed a woman's part, finally decided him. I shot at him a few equivocal glances and made use of certain lines in my part which bore upon our situation, to embolden him and lead him to declare himself; for if I do not love him

passionately, I like him well enough not to let him waste away for love; and as since my transformation he was the first who suspected that I was a woman, it was only right that I should enlighten him on this important point, and I was determined that he should not have the shadow of a doubt. He came several times to my room with a declaration of love on his lips, but he dared not speak it, — for I am bound to say that it is difficult to talk love to one who wears the same dress that you do, and who is trying on a pair of jack-boots. At last, unable to express himself by word of mouth, he wrote me a long letter, most Pindaresque in style, in which he explained at very great length what I knew a good deal better than he did.

I do not quite know what I ought to do. It would be outrageously virtuous either to grant his request or to reject it. Besides, he would be too deeply pained at being refused. If we make unhappy the people who love us, what are we to do to those who hate us? Perhaps it would be most proper to play the part of a cruel fair for some time, and to wait at least a month before undoing my tigress skin and appearing simply in my chemise. But since I have determined to yield to him, I may as well do it at once as later. I do not

quite understand those fine defences, methodically graduated, which yield one hand to-day, to-morrow the other, then the foot, then the leg as far as the knee, up to and exclusive of the garter, and those intractable virtues which are always ready to pull down the bell-rope if you trespass by a single line beyond the ground they have resolved to let you traverse that day. It makes me laugh to see these methodical Lucretias, who walk backwards with the signs of the most maidenly terror, but from time to time cast a furtive glance over their shoulder to make sure whether the sofa on which they propose to sink is directly behind them or not. That is the sort of thing which I could not do.

I am not in love with d'Albert, — at least in the sense in which I take that word, — but I certainly like him and feel affection for him; I am pleased with his mind, and his person is not disagreeable to me. There are very few people of whom I can say as much. He has not everything, but he has something. What I like in him is that he does not seek to brutally satisfy himself like other men. He has a perpetual aspiration and a sustained desire for the beautiful; material beauty alone, it is true,

but even that is a noble feeling, which suffices to maintain him in the higher regions. His conduct towards Rosette proves that his heart is upright, — an uprightness which is rarer than the other, if that is possible.

Then, — I must out with it, — I am possessed with the most violent desires. I languish and faint with voluptuousness; for the dress I wear, causing me to have all sorts of adventures with women, protects me too well against the schemes of men. A thought of pleasure never realised vaguely fills my mind, and that flat, colourless dream wearies and annoys me. There are so many women, living amid the chastest surroundings, who lead the life of prostitutes; and yet, by the most comical contrast, I remain as much of a chaste virgin as if I were Diana herself, amidst the most widespread dissipation and surrounded by the greatest debauchees of our times. Carnal ignorance unaccompanied by mental ignorance is the most wretched thing on earth. To prevent my body from posing proudly before my soul, I mean to soil it to the same extent, if — which I doubt — it is any more soiling than drinking and eating. In a word, I mean to know what a man is and the pleasure he can give. Since

d'Albert has recognised my sex under my disguise, it is only right that he should be recompensed for his penetration. He was the first to guess that I am a woman, and I shall do my best to prove to him that his supposition was well founded. It would be very uncharitable to let him believe that he had merely a monstrous inclination.

So it is d'Albert, then, who shall resolve my doubts and give me my first lesson in love. All I have to do now is to bring the crisis about in true poetic fashion. I have a great mind not to reply to his letter, but to be very cold to him for a few days; then when I see him very sad and very desperate, cursing the gods, threatening creation, and looking at the wells to see if they are not too deep to cast himself therein, I shall withdraw like the fairy-tale heroine to the end of the hall, and I shall put on my vari-coloured dress, — that is, my Rosalind costume, for my feminine wardrobe is exceedingly small. Then I shall go to his room as proud as a peacock. I shall audaciously show what I usually conceal with the greatest care, and having but a small lace kerchief tied very low and very open, I shall say to him in the most pathetic tone that I can assume, "O most elegiac and perspicacious of young

men, I am really and truly a young and maidenly beauty, who adores you into the bargain, and who asks nothing better than to give you pleasure, and herself too. Pray see if that suits you, and if you still have any scruples left, touch this, go in peace, and sin as much as you can."

Having ended this fine speech, I shall let myself fall half fainting in his arms, and while heaving melancholy sighs, I shall cleverly unhook my dress so as to be in the regulation costume, that is, half nude. D'Albert shall do the rest, and I hope that the next morning I shall know all those fine things which have troubled my brain so long, and while satisfying my curiosity, I shall have furthermore the pleasure of having made a man happy.

I also intend to go and pay Rosette a visit in the same costume, and show her that if I did not respond to her love, it was neither through coldness nor disgust. I do not mean that she shall have such a poor opinion of me, and she deserves, as well as d'Albert that I should throw off my incognito before her. What will she look like when I make this revelation? Her pride will be consoled, but her love will mourn.

Good-bye, my truest and best. Pray Heaven that the pleasure I seek may not appear to me as small a matter as those who dispense it. I have made fun all the time while writing this letter, and yet what I am about to try is a serious matter, which may affect the rest of my life.

XVI

MORE than a fortnight had elapsed since d'Albert had placed his love-letter on Theodore's table, and yet nothing seemed changed in the manner of the latter towards him. D'Albert knew not to what cause to attribute this silence. It seemed as though Theodore had never received the letter. The wretched man thought it had been mislaid and lost; yet such an explanation was not very satisfactory, for Theodore had returned to the room a moment later, and it would have been very strange if he had not perceived a large paper placed by itself on the middle of a table so as to attract the most careless glance.

Was it that, after all, Theodore was really a man, and not a woman as d'Albert had imagined? Or, if she were a woman, did she feel for him such deep aversion, such great contempt, that she did not even deign to take the trouble to reply to him? The poor young man, who had not had, like ourselves, the luck to rummage in the portfolio of Graciosa, the fair Maupin's confidante, was not in a position to decide

either affirmatively or negatively any of these important questions, and he remained sadly a prey to the most wretched indecision.

One evening he was in his room, his brow pressing hard against the pane, looking, without seeing them, at the chestnut trees in the park, which had lost much of their russet-coloured foliage. A heavy mist obscured the distance, and the night was falling grey rather than black, stepping cautiously with its velvet feet upon the tops of the trees. A great swan plunged and replunged amorously its neck and shoulders into the smoking water of the river, and its whiteness made it show in the darkness like a great star of snow. It was the single living being that somewhat enlivened the lonely landscape.

D'Albert was plunged in thoughts as melancholy as may come at five in the evening any time in foggy weather to a disappointed man, who for sole music has a rather sharp north wind, and for a view the skeleton of a leafless forest. He was thinking of throwing himself into the river, but the water struck him as very cold and very black, and he was only half persuaded by the swan's example. Then he thought of blowing out his brains, but he had neither pistols

nor powder, and would have been very sorry to have had them; then of taking a new mistress, even of taking two, — a sinister resolve! but he knew no one who would satisfy him, or even who would not satisfy him. He was so desperate that he actually thought of taking up again women who were absolutely unbearable to him, and whom he had ordered his lackey to horsewhip out of the house. He ended by deciding on something still more atrocious: he decided to write another letter, — double-dyed fool that he was.

He had reached this point when he felt a hand light on his shoulder, just like a little dove alighting on a palm-tree. The comparison is rather weak, because d'Albert's shoulder did not much resemble a palm-tree. Never mind, we maintain it from sheer love of the East.

The hand was at the end of an arm, which came from a shoulder forming part of a body, which body was none else than Theodore-Rosalind, Mlle. d'Aubigny, or Magdalen de Maupin, — to give her her real name. You can fancy who felt surprised. Neither you nor I, for you and I have long expected this visit. It was d'Albert, who did not in the least expect it. He

uttered a slight cry of surprise between an oh and an ah, yet I have the best reasons for believing that it was nearer ah than oh.

It was indeed Rosalind, so beautiful and so radiant that she lighted up the whole room, with her strings of pearls in the hair, her dress of shot-silk, her great lace cuffs, her red-heeled shoes, her splendid fan of peacock's feathers, — Rosalind, in short, as she appeared on the day of the play; only, there was an important and decisive difference. She had neither kerchief, lace, nor ruff, nor anything that might conceal from the glance those two lovely hostile twins, which, alas! but too often tend to be reconciled. Her bosom, absolutely bare, white, transparent like antique marble, of the most perfect and the most exquisite form, showed boldly out of a very low-cut bodice, and seemed to challenge the gaze. The sight was most reassuring, and d'Albert was very speedily reassured and confidently allowed himself to indulge in the wildest emotions.

"Well, Orlando, do you not recognise your Rosalind?" said the beauty, with the most winning smile, "or have you left your love hung up with your sonnets on some of the trees of the forest of Arden?

I am very much afraid that you are really cured of the love-sickness for which you begged a cure of me with so much insistence."

"Oh, no, Rosalind, I am more love-sick than ever. I am dying — I am dead — or at least, not far from it."

"You are not badly set up for a dead man, and many a living one does not look as well as you do."

"What a week I have spent! You cannot imagine it, Rosalind. I hope that it will save me a few years of purgatory, at least, in the next world. But if I may dare to ask you, why did you not reply to me sooner?"

"Why, I do not quite know, unless it was *because*. If that reason does not seem to you a sound one, there are three others less good, and you can choose from them: First, because, carried away by your passion, you forgot to write legibly, and it took me more than a week to make out what you were talking about in your letter. Next, because my maidenly modesty could not bring itself in less time to such an absurd notion as that of taking a dithyrambic poet for a lover. And then, because I was not sorry to see whether you would blow out your brains, or poison your-

self with opium, or hang yourself with your garter. That is why."

"How wicked it is! I can tell you, you were right to come to-day; you might not have found me to-morrow."

"Indeed, poor fellow! Do not look so mournful, or I shall become sentimental too, and more stupid than all the animals that were in the ark with the late Noah. If I were to let loose the flood of my sentimentality, you would be submerged by it, I warn you. Just now I gave you three poor reasons; now I offer you three good kisses. Do you accept — on condition that you will forget the reasons after the kisses? I owe you that much and a good deal more."

As she uttered these words, the fair infanta advanced towards the doleful lover and threw her beautiful arms around his neck. D'Albert kissed her warmly on both cheeks and on the lips. This kiss lasted much longer than the others, and was worth any other four. Rosalind saw that all she had done hitherto was mere childishness. Having paid her debt she sat down upon d'Albert's knee, still very much moved, and passing her fingers through his hair, she said to him, —

"All my cruelties are exhausted, my gentle friend.

I utilized this past fortnight to satisfy my native ferocity, — I will confess to you that it seemed very long to me. Do not be conceited because I am frank; but it is true. I give myself into your hands — avenge yourself for my past rigours. If you were a fool, I would not say this to you, — and indeed, I would not say anything else to you, for I am not fond of fools. It would have been very easy to make you believe that I was dreadfully shocked at your feelings, and that all your platonic sighs and your most refined euphuisms would not have been enough to win you forgiveness for a thing that I was very glad to have happen. I might, like other women, have long refused you and given you in detail what I grant you freely and at once; but I do not believe that you would therefore have loved me a single little bit more. I ask of you neither promise of eternal love nor any exaggerated protests. Love me as long as the heart will let you, and I will do as much. I will not call you a perfidious wretch when you cease to love me. You also will be kind enough to spare me the odious corresponding titles if I happen to leave you. I shall have been merely a woman who has loved you — nothing more. There is no necessity why two people should

hate each other for the rest of their lives because they have spent a night or two together. Whatever happens and wherever fate may take me, I swear to you this much—and it is a promise which may be kept—to have always a delightful remembrance of you, and if I am no longer your mistress, to be your friend, as I have been your comrade. To-night I have doffed for you my man's apparel; I shall resume it to-morrow for everybody. Remember that I am Rosalind at night only, and that during the livelong day I am, and can be, none else than Theodore de Sérannes—"

The sentence she was about to utter was lost in a kiss, followed by very many more, the number of which could not be reckoned, and the accurate enumeration of which I shall not attempt because it would certainly be rather long, and perhaps very immoral for certain people; for, as far as we are concerned, there is nothing more moral and more sacred under heaven than the caresses of a man and a woman when they both are young and handsome.

As d'Albert's attentions became more tender and more vivacious, Theodore's fair face, instead of being blooming and radiant, assumed an expression of proud melancholy, which caused her lover some uneasiness.

"Why, my dear queen, do you look as chaste and serious as the Diana of antiquity, when you ought rather to have the smiling lips of Venus rising from the sea?"

"Because, d'Albert, I am more like the huntress than any one else. When quite young I assumed man's apparel, for reasons which it would be useless to tell you; besides, it would take too long. You alone have guessed my real sex, and if I have made conquests they have been women only; very superfluous conquests, which have caused me much embarrassment more than once. Indeed, incredible and ridiculous as it may seem, I am still a virgin,—as virgin as the snows of the Himalayas, as the moon before it slept with Endymion; and I am serious, as any one would be, who is about to do something which cannot be recalled. I am about to undergo a metamorphosis, a transformation, going to change from maid to woman, to be unable to-morrow to give what I had yesterday. There is something I do not know and which I am going to learn, an important leaf is going to be turned in the book of my life. That is why I look so sad, my friend, and not because of anything which you have done."

As she said these words, she parted with her fair hands the long locks of the young man and touched his pale brow with her soft lips.

D'Albert, deeply moved by the sweet and solemn way in which she spoke this long speech, took her hands and kissed each individual finger, one after another; then he very gently broke the lacing of her dress, so that the bodice flew open and the two white treasures appeared in all their splendour. On those breasts, brilliantly fair like silver, bloomed the two fair roses of Paradise. He softly pressed the rosy nipples with his lips, and in similar fashion followed the entire contour. Rosalind lent herself to his caresses with inexhaustible willingness, and tried to return them as exactly as possible.

"No doubt you think me very awkward and cold, dear d'Albert; but I am not versed in this sort of thing. You will have much to teach me, and it is a troublesome task I have set you."

D'Albert replied in the best possible way: that is, he did not reply at all, and clasping her in his arms with renewed vehemence, he showered kisses upon her bare shoulders and breasts. The hair of the half-swooning fair fell down; her dress slipped to her feet

as if [illegible] ment. She remained star[illegible] white app[illegible], with nothing on but a che[illegible] me[illegible] [illegible] linen. The happy lover [illegible] the two pretty red-heeled sh[illegible] [illegible] corner of the room, th[illegible] [illegible] fast upon them.

[illegible] with a happy spirit of [illegible] [illegible] behind the dress: first i[illegible] [illegible] without an attempt be[illegible] [illegible], profiting by a moment [illegible] [illegible] them most cleverly [illegible] [illegible] the roundness of which [illegible] [illegible] that [illegible] salind noticed th[illegible] [illegible] garment and ra[illegible] [illegible] falling altogether.

[illegible]

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[illegible] & CO

as if by enchantment. She remained standing like a white apparition, with nothing on but a chemise of the most transparent linen. The happy lover knelt and speedily sent the two pretty red-heeled shoes flying each to a different corner of the room, the clocked stockings following fast upon them.

The chemise, filled with a happy spirit of imitation, did not remain far behind the dress: first it slipped from off the shoulders without an attempt being made to prevent it, then, profiting by a moment when the arms hung limp, it left them most cleverly and fluffed down to the hips, the roundness of which half stopped it. It was then that Rosalind noticed the treacherousness of her sole remaining garment and raised her knee slightly to prevent its falling altogether. Thus posed, she was the perfect reproduction of those marble statues of goddesses, whose intelligent drapery, annoyed at being made to conceal so many charms, regretfully envelops the thighs, and, through a fortunate disappointment, stops exactly above the spot it is destined to conceal. But Rosalind's chemise, not being of marble and not being held up by its folds, continued its triumphal descent and fell in a round heap at its mistress's feet, where it lay like a great white greyhound.

Thus [illegible] was the perfect [illegible] of the [illegible]

There was of course, a very simple way of preventing all this disorder, which was to clutch the falling garment with the hand; but this very natural idea did not occur to our modest heroine.

So she remained unveiled, — her fallen garments forming a sort of pedestal, — in all the diaphanous splendour of her lovely nudity, under the soft light of an alabaster lamp that d'Albert had lighted.

He contemplated her as one dazzled and ravished.

"I am cold," said she, crossing her arms on her bosom.

"One moment more, I beseech you!"

Rosalind uncrossed her arms, rested the tip of her fingers upon the back of an arm-chair, and remained motionless. She leaned slightly upon one hip in a way that brought out the full richness of its undulating lines. She seemed in no wise embarrassed; the quickened beating of her heart alone caused the contour of her left breast to tremble somewhat.

The young enthusiast of beauty could not gaze sufficiently upon the sight before him, and we are bound to say, to the credit of Rosalind, that this time the reality surpassed his dream, and that he did not experience the least disappointment.

The beautiful body that posed before him combined everything: delicacy and strength, colour and form, the lines of a Greek statue of the finest period of the art with the tone of a Titian. He beheld, tangible and concrete, the vague chimera he had so often endeavoured to stay in its flight; he was not compelled, as he had complained so bitterly to his friend Silvio, to restrict his glances to a given fairly well-made part and not allow them to wander beyond it, lest he should see something frightful; his lovelit eye descended from the head to the feet and travelled back from the feet to the head, ever caressing a perfect and harmonious form.

The knees were admirably well shaped, the ankles admirably turned and lissome, the legs and thighs modelled in firm and splendid fashion, the belly shone like an agate, the hips were supple and broad, the bosom was fit to call the gods from on high for the sake of kissing it, the arms and shoulders perfect in shape. A flood of beautiful brown hair, slightly wavy, such as is seen on heads by old masters, fell in wavelets down an ivory white back, the fairness of which it brought out still more strongly.

Once the artist was satisfied, the lover resumed the upper hand; for however devoted to art one may

be, there are things that one cannot be long satisfied with merely gazing upon. He caught up his beauty in his arms and bore her to the bed. In the twinkling of an eye he was himself undressed and sprang in beside her.

The girl pressed close to him and clasped him in her arms, for her breasts were as cold as the snow whose whiteness they rivalled. The contact of this cool skin inflamed d'Albert still more and excited him to the highest point. Soon she was as hot as he. He lavished on her the maddest and most ardent of caresses — on her bosom, her shoulders, her neck, her arms, her feet; he wished that he could cover in one great kiss that lovely form that almost melted into his, so close was their embrace. Amid that profusion of exquisite charms he did not know which to caress first.

There were no longer any intervals between their kisses, and Rosalind's perfumed lips made but one mouth with those of d'Albert. Their bosoms rose and swelled; their eyes were half closed; their arms, inert through excess of pleasure, could no longer clasp each the other's body.

Rosalind had capacity for learning, and made the most rapid progress in that single night. The physi-

cal ignorance that everything amazed, joined to a corruption of the mind that nothing surprised, formed the most piquant and delightful of contrasts. D'Albert was ravished, transported with delight, overjoyed, and wished the night would last forty-eight hours, like that in which Hercules was conceived. Towards morning, however, spite of innumerable kisses, caresses, and fondlings, the most amorous that can be imagined, and well calculated to keep him wide-awake, he was compelled to take some rest. A gentle and voluptuous slumber brushed his eyes with the tip of its wings; his head sank down and he fell asleep on the bosom of his lovely mistress. She looked at him for a time with an air of deep and melancholic reflection; then, as the dawn sent its pale rays through the curtains, she raised him gently, laid him down again by her side, sat up and climbed lightly over him.

She picked up her garments, dressed quickly; then returned to the bedside, bent over the still sleeping d'Albert, and kissed his two eyes on their long and silky lashes. Thereafter she withdrew, walking backwards and still looking at him.

Instead of returning to her room, she entered Rosette's. What she did and said there I have never

been able to learn, though I have conscientiously endeavoured to do so. I have found nothing in the papers of Graciosa, or in those of d'Albert or Silvio that referred to that visit.

It was fully noon when Theodore emerged from Rosette's chamber. He did not appear at either dinner or supper, and neither d'Albert nor Rosette manifested any surprise at the fact. He went to bed very early, and the next morning, at dawn, without informing any one, he saddled his own horse and that of his page, and left the house, telling the footman that he would not be back to dinner and might not return for a few days.

D'Albert and Rosette were amazed beyond description, and knew not to what cause to attribute this sudden disappearance. Towards the end of the week the unhappy and disappointed lover received a letter from Theodore which we shall transcribe. I greatly fear it will not satisfy my readers of either sex; but, in truth, the letter was as I give it and not otherwise, and this glorious novel shall have no other conclusion.

XVII

YOU are no doubt greatly surprised, my dear d'Albert, at what I am doing, after what I have done. Well, you have reason to be so. I wager that you have already applied to me at least a score of those epithets which we had agreed to strike from our vocabulary, — perfidious, inconstant, weak, — have you not? At least you will not call me either cruel or virtuous; that is so much to the good. You are cursing me, but you are wrong. You desired me, you loved me, I was your idol. Very good! I granted you at once what you wanted. It is your own fault if you did not obtain it sooner. I most complacently incarnated your dream. I have given you what I shall certainly not give again to any one, — a surprise on which you scarcely reckoned and for which you certainly ought to be more grateful. Now that I have satisfied you, I choose to go away. What is there so monstrous in that?

You have possessed me wholly and unreservedly for a whole night. What more do you want? Another night, and still another; you would even add the days

at need. And so you would go on until you were tired of me. Oh, I can hear you protest most gallantly that I am not one of those of whom men tire. Why not of me just as much as of others?

It would last six months, two years, — ten years if you like; but everything has an end, and you would keep me because you would feel, in a way, that that was the right thing to do, or because you would not have the strength of mind to go. What is the use of waiting until we get to that point?

Then I might perhaps have ceased to love you. I have found you charming; perhaps by dint of seeing you I might come to think you detestable. Forgive me this suspicion. Living with you in the closest intimacy, I no doubt should have had an opportunity of seeing you with a night-cap on, or in some ridiculous or comical domestic situation. You would necessarily have lost the romantic and mysterious aspect which, more than anything else, seduces me, and once I understood your character better it would not have seemed to me so strange. I should have been less concerned about you, having you near me, very much as is the case with books which are never opened because they happen to be in one's library.

Your nose — or your mind — would have ceased to seem to me as well turned. I should have noticed that your coat did not fit you, and that your stockings were not drawn tight. I should have experienced innumerable disappointments of this kind, which would have made me suffer greatly; and finally I should have come to the conclusion that you really were heartless and soulless, and that I was fated never to be loved by any one who understood me.

You adore me, and I adore you too. You have not the least reproach to make to me, and I have not the least reason to complain of you. I remained perfectly faithful to you during the whole duration of our amour. I deceived you in nothing; I have neither a false bosom nor a false virtue. You were so exceedingly good as to say that I was even more beautiful than you had imagined. In return for the beauty I gave you, you gave me much pleasure. We are quits. I am going my way and you are going yours. It may be we shall meet at the end of the play. Cherish this hope while you live.

You think, perhaps, that I leave you because I do not love you. By and by you will find this to be true, — that I would have stopped if I had thought

less highly of you, and I would have made you drink the tasteless draught to the dregs. Your love would soon have been killed by weariness. At the end of a certain time you would have completely forgotten me, and on coming across my name on the list of your conquests, you would have asked yourself, "Who the devil was she?" I have at least the satisfaction of thinking that you will remember me more than any one else. Your unsatisfied desire will still spread its wings to fly to me. I shall always be for you something desirable, to which your fancy, your love will return; and I hope that in the arms of the mistresses whom you may have in the future, you will sometimes think of that one and only night you spent with me.

Never will you be more loving than you were on that blessed night; and even if you were to be as loving, you would then already be less so, for in love, as in poetry, to reach the same point only is to go back. You will be wise to be satisfied with this impression. You have rendered difficult the task of the lovers I may have — if I do have other lovers; and no one shall make me forget you. All will be merely the heirs of Alexander.

If the loss of me is too great a grief for you, burn

this letter, which is the sole proof that you possessed me, and you will then believe you dreamed a fair dream, — why should you not? The vision vanished before dawn, at that hour when dreams return home through the horn or the ivory gate. How many men there are who, less fortunate than you, have not been able to kiss their chimera even once! I am neither capricious nor crazy nor prudish. My action is the result of deep conviction, — it is not through calculated coquetry and to inflame you still more that I leave C——. Do not try to follow me or to find me. You would fail, for I have taken too good care to conceal from you where I have gone. You shall always be for me the man who introduced me to a world of new sensations, — that is a thing a woman does not forget easily. Although absent, I shall think often of you, oftener than if you were by me.

Do your best to console poor Rosette, whom my departure must grieve at least as much as it grieves you. Love each other warmly, in remembrance of me whom you have both loved, and whisper my name sometimes as you exchange kisses.

THE END

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